

THE STORIES OF H. C. BUNNER

MORE "SHORT SIXES"
THE RUNAWAY BROWNS

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THE STORIES
OF
H. C. BUNNER

MORE "SHORT SIXES"
THE RUNAWAY BROWNS
A STORY OF SMALL STORIES

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1917

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To
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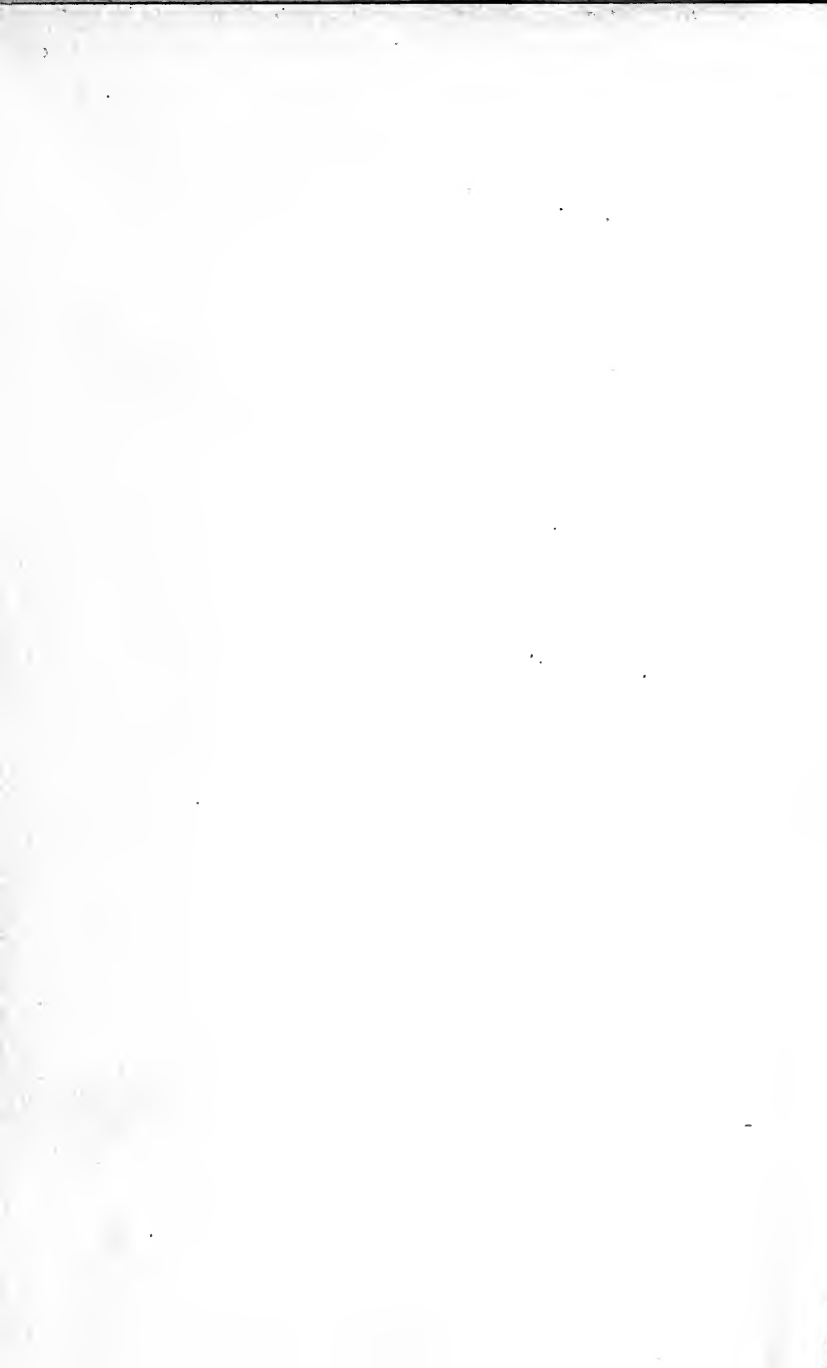


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CONTENTS

MORE "SHORT SIXES":

	PAGE
THE CUMBERSOME HORSE	1
MR. VINCENT EGG AND THE WAGE OF SIN . .	18
THE GHOOLLAH	37
CUTWATER OF SENECA	54
MR. WICK'S AUNT	66
WHAT MRS. FORTESCUE DID	87
"THE MAN WITH THE PINK PANTS" . . .	107
THE THIRD FIGURE IN THE COTILLION . .	125
"SAMANTHA BOOM-DE-AY"	144
MY DEAR MRS. BILLINGTON	172
THE RUNAWAY BROWNS	187



MORE "SHORT SIXES"



THE CUMBERSOME HORSE

IT is not to be denied that a sense of disappointment pervaded Mr. Brimmington's being in the hour of his first acquaintance with the isolated farm-house which he had just purchased, sight unseen, after long epistolary negotiations with Mr. Hiram Skinner, postmaster, carpenter, teamster and real estate agent of Bethel Corners, who was now driving him to his new domain.

Perhaps the feeling was of a mixed origin. Indian Summer was much colder up in the Pennsylvania hills than he had expected to find it; and the hills themselves were much larger and bleaker and barer, and far more indifferent in their demeanor toward him, than he had expected to find them. Then Mr. Skinner had been something of a disappointment, himself. He was too familiar with his big, knobby, red hands; too furtive with his small, close-set eyes; too profuse of tobacco-juice, and too raspingly loquacious. And certainly the house itself did not meet his expectations when he first saw it, standing lonely and desolate in its ragged meadows of stubble and wild-grass on the unpleasantly steep mountain-side.

And yet Mr. Skinner had accomplished for him the desire of his heart. He had always said that

when he should come into his money—forty thousand dollars from a maiden aunt—he would quit forever his toilsome job of preparing Young Gentlemen for admission to the Larger Colleges and Universities, and would devote the next few years to writing his long-projected “History of Prehistoric Man.” And to go about this task he had always said that he would go and live in perfect solitude—that is, all by himself and a chorewoman—in a secluded farm-house, situated upon the southerly slope of some high hill—an old farm-house—a Revolutionary farm-house, if possible—a delightful, long, low, rambling farm-house—a farm-house with floors of various levels—a farm-house with crooked stairs, and with nooks and corners and quaint cupboards—this—this had been the desire of Mr. Brimington’s heart.

Mr. Brimington, when he came into his money at the age of forty-five, fixed on Pike County, Pennsylvania, as a mountainous country of good report. A postal-guide informed him that Mr. Skinner was the postmaster of Bethel Corners; so, Mr. Brimington wrote to Mr. Skinner.

The correspondence between Mr. Brimington and Mr. Skinner was long enough and full enough to have settled a treaty between two nations. It ended by a discovery of a house lonely enough and aged enough to fill the bill. Several hundred dollars’ worth of repairs were needed to make it habitable, and Mr. Skinner was employed

to make them. Toward the close of a cold November day, Mr. Brimmington saw his purchase for the first time.

In spite of his disappointment, he had to admit, as he walked around the place in the early twilight, that it was just what he had bargained for. The situation, the dimensions, the exposure, were all exactly what had been stipulated. About its age there could be no question. Internally, its irregularity—indeed, its utter failure to conform to any known rules of domestic architecture—surpassed Mr. Brimmington's wildest expectations. It had stairs eighteen inches wide; it had rooms of strange shapes and sizes; it had strange, shallow cupboards in strange places; it had no hallways; its windows were of odd design, and whoso wanted variety in floors could find it there. And along the main wall of Mr. Brimmington's study there ran a structure some three feet and a half high and nearly as deep, which Mr. Skinner confidently assured him was used in old times as a wall-bench or a dresser, indifferently. "You might think," said Mr. Skinner, "that all that space inside there was jest wasted; but it ain't so. Them seats is jest filled up inside with braces so's that you can set on them good and solid." And then Mr. Skinner proudly called attention to the two coats of gray paint spread over the entire side of the house, walls, ceilings and woodwork, blending the original portions and the Skinner restorations in one harmonious, homogeneous whole.

Mr. Skinner might have told him that this variety of gray paint is highly popular in some rural districts, and is made by mixing lamp-black and ball-blue with a low grade of white lead. But he did not say it; and he drove away as soon as he conveniently could, after formally introducing him to Mrs. Sparhawk, a gaunt, stern-faced, silent, elderly woman. Mrs. Sparhawk was to take charge of his bachelor establishment during the day time. Mrs. Sparhawk cooked him a meal for which she very properly apologized. Then she returned to her kitchen to "clean up." Mr. Brimington went to the front door, partly to look out upon his property, and partly to turn his back on the gray paint. There were no steps before the front door, but a newly-graded mound or earthwork about the size of a half-hogshead. He looked out upon his apple-orchard, which was further away than he had expected to find it. It had been out of bearing for ten years, but this Mr. Brimington did not know. He did know, however, that the whole outlook was distinctly dreary.

As he stood there and gazed out into the twilight, two forms suddenly approached him. Around one corner of the house came Mrs. Sparhawk on her way home. Around the other came an immensely tall, whitish shape, lumbering forward with a heavy tread. Before he knew it, it had scrambled up the side of his mound with a clumsy, ponderous rush, and was thrusting itself directly upon him when he uttered so lusty a cry

of dismay that it fell back startled; and, wheeling about a great long body that swayed on four misshapen legs, it pounded off in the direction it had come from, and disappeared around the corner. Mr. Brimington turned to Mrs. Sparhawk in disquiet and indignation.

"Mrs. Sparhawk," he demanded; "what is that?"

"It's a horse," said Mrs. Sparhawk, not at all surprised, for she knew that Mr. Brimington was from the city. "They hitch 'em to wagons here."

"I know it is a horse, Mrs. Sparhawk," Mr. Brimington rejoined with some asperity; "but whose horse is it, and what is it doing on my premises?"

"I don't rightly know whose horse it is," replied Mrs. Sparhawk; "the man that used to own it, he's dead now."

"But what," inquired Mr. Brimington sternly, "is the animal doing here?"

"I guess he b'longs here," Mrs. Sparhawk said. She had a cold, even, impersonal way of speaking, as though she felt that her safest course in life was to confine herself strictly to such statements of fact as might be absolutely required of her.

"But, my good woman," replied Mr. Brimington, in bewilderment, "how can that be? The animal can't certainly belong on my property unless he belongs to me, and that animal certainly is not mine."

Seeing him so much at a loss and so greatly disturbed in mind, Mrs. Sparhawk relented a little from her strict rule of life, and made an attempt at explanation.

"He b'longed to the man who owned this place first off; and I don' know for sure, but I've heard tell that *he* fixed it some way so's that the horse would sort of go with the place."

Mr. Brimmington felt irritation rising within him.

"But," he said, "it's preposterous! There was no such consideration in the deed. No such thing can be done, Mrs. Sparhawk, without my acquiescence!"

"I don't know nothin' about that," said Mrs. Sparhawk; "what I do know is, the place has changed hands often enough since, and the horse has always went with the place."

There was an unsettled suggestion in the first part of this statement of Mrs. Sparhawk that gave a shock to Mr. Brimmington's nerves. He laughed uneasily.

"Oh, er, yes! I see. Very probably there's been some understanding. I suppose I am to regard the horse as a sort of lien upon the place—a—a—what do they call it?—an incumbrance! Yes," he repeated, more to himself than to Mrs. Sparhawk; "an incumbrance. I've got a gentleman's country place with a horse incumbrant."

Mrs. Sparhawk heard him, however.

"It is a sorter cumbersome horse," she said. And without another word she gathered her

shawl about her shoulders, and strode off into the darkness.

Mr. Brimington turned back into the house, and busied himself with a vain attempt to make his long-cherished furniture look at home in his new leaden-hued rooms. The ungrateful task gave him the blues; and, after an hour of it, he went to bed.

He was dreaming leaden-hued dreams, oppressed, uncomfortable dreams, when a peculiarly weird and uncanny series of thumps on the front of the house awoke him with a start. The thumps might have been made by a giant with a weaver's beam, but he must have been a very drunken giant to group his thumps in such a disorderly parody of time and sequence.

Mr. Brimington had too guileless and clean a heart to be the prey of undefined terrors. He rose, ran to the window and opened it. The moonlight lit up the raw, frosty landscape with a cold, pale, diffused radiance, and Mr. Brimington could plainly see right below him the cumbersome horse, cumbersomely trying to maintain a footing on the top of the little mound before the front door. When, for a fleeting instant, he seemed to think that he had succeeded in this feat, he tried to bolt through the door. As soon, however, as one of his huge knees smote the panel, his hind feet lost their grip on the soft earth, and he wobbled back down the incline, where he stood shaking and quivering, until he could muster wind enough for another

attempt to make a catapult of himself. The veil-like illumination of the night, which turned all things else to a dim, silvery gray, could not hide the scars and bruises and worn places that spotted the animal's great, gaunt, distorted frame. His knees were as big as a man's head. His feet were enormous. His joints stood out from his shriveled carcass like so many pine knots. Mr. Brimmington gazed at him, fascinated, horrified, until a rush more desperate and uncertain than the rest threatened to break his front door in.

"Hi!" shrieked Mr. Brimmington; "go away!"

It was the horse's turn to get frightened. He lifted his long, coffin-shaped head toward Mr. Brimmington's window, cast a sort of blind, cross-eyed, ineffectual glance at him, and with a long-drawn, wheezing, cough-choked whinny he backed down the mound, got himself about, end for end, with such extreme awkwardness that he hurt one poor knee on a hitching-post that looked to be ten feet out of his way, and limped off to the rear of the house.

The sound of that awful, rusty, wind-broken whinny haunted Mr. Brimmington all the rest of that night. It was like the sound of an orchestration run down, or of a man who is utterly tired of the whooping-cough and doesn't care who knows it.

The next morning was bright and sunshiny, and Mr. Brimmington awoke in a more cheerful frame of mind than he would naturally have ex-

pected to find himself in after his perturbed night. He found himself inclined to make the best of his purchase and to view it in as favorable a light as possible. He went outside and looked at it from various points of view, trying to find and if possible to dispose of the reason for the vague sense of disappointment which he felt, having come into possession of the rambling old farm-house, which he had so much desired.

He decided, after a long and careful inspection, that it was the *proportions* of the house that were wrong. They were certainly peculiar. It was singularly high between joints in the first story, and singularly low in the second. In spite of its irregularity within, it was uncompromisingly square on the outside. There was something queer about the pitch of its roof, and it seemed strange that so modest a structure with no hallway whatever should have vestibule windows on each side of its doors, both front and rear.

But here an idea flashed into Mr. Brimington's mind that in an instant changed him from a carping critic to a delighted discoverer. He was living in a Block House! Yes; that explained—that accounted for all the strangeness of its architecture. In an instant he found his purchase invested with a beautiful glamour of adventurous association. Here was the stout and well-planned refuge to which the grave settlers of an earlier day had fled to guard themselves against the attack of the vindictive red-skins.

He saw it all. A moat, crossed no doubt by draw-bridges, had surrounded the building. In the main room below, the women and children had huddled while their courageous defenders had poured a leaden hail upon the foe through loop-holes in the upper story. He walked around the house for some time, looking for loop-holes.

So pleased was Mr. Brimmington at his theory that the morning passed rapidly away, and when he looked at his watch he was surprised to find that it was nearly noon. Then he remembered that Mr. Skinner had promised to call on him at eleven, to make anything right that was not right. Glancing over the landscape he saw Mr. Skinner approaching by a circuitous track. He was apparently following the course of a snake fence which he could readily have climbed. This seemed strange, as his way across the pasture land was seemingly unimpeded. Thinking of the pasture land made Mr. Brimmington think of the white horse, and casting his eyes a little further down the hill he saw that animal slowly and painfully steering a parallel course to Mr. Skinner, on the other side of the fence. Mr. Skinner went out of sight behind a clump of trees, and when he arrived it was not upon the side of the house where Mr. Brimmington had expected to see him appear.

As they were about to enter the house Mr. Brimmington noticed the marks of last night's attack upon his front door, and he spoke to Mr. Skinner about the horse.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Skinner, with much ingenuousness; "that horse. I was meaning to speak to you about that horse. Fact is, I've kinder got that horse on my hands, and if it's no inconvenience to you, I'd like to leave him where he is for a little while."

"But it would be very inconvenient, indeed, Mr. Skinner," said the new owner of the house. "The animal is a very unpleasant object; and, moreover, it attempted to break into my front door last night."

Mr. Skinner's face darkened. "Sho!" he said; "you don't mean to tell me that?"

But Mr. Brimington did mean to tell him that, and Mr. Skinner listened with a scowl of unconcealed perplexity and annoyance. He bit his lip reflectively for a minute or two before he spoke.

"Too bad you was disturbed," he said at length. "You'll have to keep the bars up to that meadow and then it won't happen again."

"But, indeed, it must not happen again," said Mr. Brimington; "the horse must be taken away."

"Well, you see it's this way, friend," returned Mr. Skinner, with a rather ugly air of decision; "I really ain't got no choice in the matter. I'd like to oblige you, and if I'd known as far back that you would have objected to the animal I'd have had him took somewheres. But, as it is, there ain't no such a thing as getting that there horse off this here place till the frost's out of

the ground. You can see for yourself that that horse, the condition he's in now, couldn't no more go up nor down this hill than he could fly. Why, I came over here a-foot this morning on purpose not to take them horses of mine over this road again. It can't be done, sir."

"Very well," suggested Mr. Brimington; "kill the horse."

"I ain't killin' no horses," said Mr. Skinner. "You may if you like; but I'd advise you not to. There's them as mightn't like it."

"Well, let them come and take their horse away, then," said Mr. Brimington.

"Just so," assented Mr. Skinner. "It's they who are concerned in the horse, and they have a right to take him away. I would if I was any ways concerned, but I ain't." Here he turned suddenly upon Mr. Brimington. "Why, look here," he said, "you ain't got the heart to turn that there horse out of that there pasture where he's been for fifteen years! It won't do you no sorter hurt to have him stay there till Spring. Put the bars up, and he won't trouble you no more."

"But," objected Mr. Brimington, weakly, "even if the poor creature were not so unsightly, he could not be left alone all Winter in that pasture without shelter."

"That's just where you're mistaken," Mr. Skinner replied, tapping his interlocutor heavily upon the shoulder; "he don't mind it not one mite. See that shed there?" And he pointed to

a few wind-racked boards in the corner of the lot. "There's hoss-shelter; and as for feed, why there's feed enough in that meadow for two such as him."

In the end, Mr. Brimmington, being utterly ignorant of the nature and needs of horse-flesh, was over-persuaded, and he consented to let the unfortunate white horse remain in his pasture lot to be the sport of the Winter's chill and bitter cruelty. Then he and Mr. Skinner talked about some new paint.

.

It was the dead vast and middle of Mr. Brimmington's third night in his new house, when he was absolutely knocked out of a calm and peaceful slumber by a crash so appalling that he at first thought that the side of the mountain had slid down upon his dwelling. This was followed by other crashes, thumps, the tearing of woodwork and various strange and grewsome noises. Whatever it might be, Mr. Brimmington felt certain that it was no secret midnight marauder, and he hastened to the eighteen-inch stairway without even waiting to put on a dressing-gown. A rush of cold air came up from below, and he had no choice but to scuttle back for a bath-robe and a candle while the noises continued, and the cold air floated all over the house.

There was no difficulty in locating the sounds. Mr. Brimmington presented himself at the door of the little kitchen, pulled it open, and, raising

the light above his head, looked in. The rush of wind blew out his light, but not before he had had time to see that it was the white horse that was in the kitchen, and that he had gone through the floor.

Subsequent investigation proved that the horse had come in through the back door, carrying that and its two vestibule windows with him, and that he had first trampled and then churned the thin floor into match-wood. He was now reposing on his stomach, with his legs hanging down between the joists into the hollow under the house—for there was no cellar. He looked over his shoulder at his host and emitted his blood-curdling wail.

“My Gracious!” said Mr. Brimington.

That night Mr. Brimington sat up with the horse, both of them wrapped, as well as Mr. Brimington could do it, in bed-clothes. There is not much you can do with a horse when you have to sit up with him under such circumstances. The thought crossed Mr. Brimington’s mind of reading to him, but he dismissed it.

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In the interview the next day, between Mr. Brimington and Mr. Skinner, the aggressiveness was all on Mr. Brimington’s side, and Mr. Skinner was meek and wore an anxious expression. Mr. Brimington had, however, changed his point of view. He now realized that sleeping out of Winter nights might be unpleasant,

even painful to an aged and rheumatic horse. And, although he had cause of legitimate complaint against the creature, he could no longer bear to think of killing the animal with whom he had shared that cold and silent vigil. He commissioned Mr. Skinner to build for the brute a small but commodious lodging, and to provide a proper stock of provender—commissions which Mr. Skinner gladly and humbly accepted. As to the undertaking to get the horse out of his immediate predicament, however, Mr. Skinner absolutely refused to touch the job. “That horse don’t like me,” said Mr. Skinner; “I know he don’t; I seen it in his eyes long ago. If you like, I’ll send you two or three men and a block-and-tackle, and they can get him out; but not me; no, sir!”

Mr. Skinner devoted that day to repairing damages, and promised on the morrow to begin the building of the little barn. Mr. Brimington was glad there was going to be no greater delay, when, early in the evening, the sociable white horse tried to put his front feet through the study window.

But of all the noises that startled Mr. Brimington, in the first week of his sojourn in the farm-house, the most alarming awakened him about eight o’clock of the following morning. Hurrying to his study, he gazed in wonder upon a scene unparalleled even in the History of Pre-historic Man. The boards had been ripped off the curious structure which was supposed to

have served the hardy settlers for a wall-bench and a dresser, indifferently. This revealed another structure in the form of a long crib or bin, within which, apparently trying to back out through the wall, stood Mr. Skinner, holding his tool-box in front of him as if to shield himself, and fairly yelping with terror. The front door was off its hinges, and there stood Mrs. Sparhawk wielding a broom to keep out the white horse, who was viciously trying to force an entrance. Mr. Brimmington asked what it all meant; and Mrs. Sparhawk, turning a desperate face upon him, spoke with the vigor of a woman who has kept silence too long.

"It means," she said, "that this here house of yours is this here horse's stable; *and the horse knows it*; and that there was the horse's manger. This here horse was old Colonel Josh Pincus's regimental horse, and so provided for in his will; and this here man Skinner was to have the caring of him until he should die a natural death, and then he was to have this stable; and till then the stable was left to the horse. And now he's taken the stable away from the horse, and patched it up into a dwelling-house for a fool from New York City; and the horse don't like it; and the horse don't like Skinner. And when he come back to git that manger for your barn, the horse sot onto him. And that's what's the matter, Mr. Skimmerton."

"Mrs. Sparhawk," began Mr. Brimmington—"I *ain't* no Sparhawk!" fairly shouted the en-

raged woman, as with a furious shove she sent the Cumbersome Horse staggering down the doorway mound; "this here's Hiram Skinner, the meanest man in Pike County, and I'm his wife, let out to do day's work. You've had one week of him—how would you have liked twenty years?"

MR. VINCENT EGG AND THE WAGE OF SIN

MR. VINCENT EGG and the daughter of his washerwoman walked out of the front doorway of Mr. Egg's lodging-house into the morning sunlight, with very different expressions upon their two faces.

Mr. Vincent Egg, although he was old and stout and red-nosed and shabby in his attire, wore a look that was at once timorous, fatuous, and weakly mendacious; a look that tried to tell the possible passer-by that his red nose and watery eyes bloomed and blinked in the smiles of Virginie. Virginie, although she was young and pretty and also thin of face and poverty-stricken of garb, wore a look which told you plainly and most honestly beyond a question, that she had no smiles for Mr. Egg or for any one else. They walked down the middle of the street side by side, but *that* they could not very well help doing, for the street was both narrow and dirty, and the edges of the stone gutter down its midway offered the only clean foothold in its entire breadth. As they walked on together, Mr. Egg made a few poor-spirited attempts to start up a gallant conversation with the girl; but she made no response whatever to his remarks, and

strode on in dark-faced silence, her empty wash-basket poised between her lank right hip and her thin right elbow. Mr. Egg hemmed and cleared a husky throat, and employed both his unsteady hands in setting his tall, shabby silk hat upon his head in such a manner that its broad brim might keep the sunlight out of his eyes.

Mr. Vincent Egg was in the little city of Drignan on business. His lodgings were in the rue des Quatres Mulets, because they were the cheapest lodgings he could find. There are prettier towns than Drignan, and even in Drignan there are many better streets than the rue des Quatres Mulets. But it was much the same to Mr. Egg. He took his shabby lodgings, the rebuffs of the fair, the sunlight of other men's fortunes dazzling his weak eyes—all these things he took with an easy indifference of mind so long as life gave him the little he asked of it, namely: a periodic indulgence in alcoholic unconsciousness. A simple drunk, once a month, of at least a weeks' duration, was what Mr. Egg's soul most craved and desired; but if his fluctuating means made the period of intoxication briefer or the period of sobriety longer, he bore either event with a certain simple heroism. He wanted no "spree," no "toot," no "tear;" a modest spell of sodden, dreamy, tearfully happy soaking in the back-room of some cheap wine-shop where he and his ways were known—this was all that remained of ambition and aspiration in Mr. Egg's life; which had been, for the rest, a long life, a

harmless life (except in the stern moralist's sense), and a life that was decidedly a round, complete and total failure in spite of an exceptional allotment of abilities and opportunities. Mr. Egg had been many things in the course of that long and varied life—lawyer, doctor, newspaper-man, speculator, actor, manager, horse-dealer and race-track gamester, croupier (and courier, even, after a fashion)—and heaven knows what else besides, of things avowable and unavowable. Just at present, he was supplying an English firm of Tourist-Excursion Managers with a guide-book of their various routes, at the rate of eighteen-pence per page of small type, and his traveling expenses—third-class. He had just finished “doing up” the district last allotted to him; and, after two weeks’ of traveling about, he had spent another fortnight in writing up his notes in a dingy little lodging-house room in the rue des Quatres Mulets. He knew his ground thoroughly, and that was the cheapest place.

Such was Mr. Vincent Egg, after a half-century of struggle with the world; and something of an imposing figure he made, too, in his defeat and degradation. His nose was red, his cheeks were puffed and veined, there were bags under his bloodshot eyes, his close-cropped hair was thin, his stubby little gray moustache, desperately waxed at the ends, gave an incongruously foreign touch to his decidedly Anglo-Saxon face—and his clothes were shockingly shabby. But

then he *wore* his clothes, as few men in our day can wear clothes; and they were *his* clothes; his very own, and not another's. People often spoke of him, after seeing him once, as "that big, soldierly-looking old man in the white hat." But he did not wear a white hat. His hat, which was one of the largest, one of the jauntiest and one of the oldest ever seen, had also been, in its time, one of the blackest. It was his coat that gave people an idea of his having something about him that suggested white. It was a tightly-buttoned frock-coat of an indescribable light-dirty color. Most hopelessly shabby men cling to some standard of taste in dress that was *the* standard in their last-remembered days of prosperity. That coat—if it were one coat and not only one of a long-lived family—marked the fact that the last season of prosperity Mr. Egg had enjoyed was a season, now some twenty years gone, when the London "swells" or "nobs," or whatever they called them then, wore frock-coats of certain fashionable light shades of fawn and mouse-color, then known, I believe, as "London Smoke" and "French Gray." While it cannot be said that Mr. Egg's coat was familiar in every quarter of Europe (for it rarely stayed long enough in any one place), it had certainly been seen in all. And more than one Austrian officer, after passing Mr. Egg in that garment of pallid, dubious and puzzling hue, had turned sharply around to satisfy himself that it was not a uniform-coat in a condition of

profanation. A certain state and dignity that still clung to this coat, and the startling cleanliness of his well-scissored cuffs and collars were all that remained to give Mr. Egg a hold upon exterior respectability.

With such a history, Mr. Egg was naturally well versed in the freemasonry of poverty and need. As his eyes became accustomed to the sun, he looked at the girl's pinched face, and his tones suddenly changed. Vincent Egg spoke several languages, and he knew all their social dialects and variations. It was in friendly and familiar speech that he addressed the girl, and asked her—What was the matter? and, Was the business going ill?

If Virginie had been the poor girl you meet with in the stories written by English ladies of a mildly religious turn of mind, she would have dropped a little curtsey and said with a single tear, "Indeed, sir, I had not meant to speak, but you have hit upon the truth. The business goes very ill, indeed, and without help I do not see how my poor mother can survive the Winter." But Virginie, obeying the instincts of her nature and her education, responded to Mr. Egg with a single coarse French adjective which is only to be rendered in English, I am afraid, by the word "stinking."

Mr. Egg was not in the least shocked. He cast his blinking eyes about him at the filthy roadway, at the narrow old stone houses that crowded both sides of the street with the peaked

roofs of their over-hanging upper stories, almost shutting out the sky above his head, at the countless century-old stains of damp and rust and shameful soilure upon their dull faces, and he said simply:

“Fichu locale!”

Thereby he amply expressed to his hearer his opinion that if the business deserved the adjective she had accorded it, the explanation was to be found in its unfortunate location. This opened the flood gates of Virginie’s speech. She told Mr. Egg that he was entirely right about the location, and gave him a few casual corroborative details which showed him that she knew what she was talking about. She also confided to him enough of her family affairs to account for the bitterness of her spirit and her contempt for mirthful dalliance. It was nothing but the old endless story of poverty in one of its innumerable variants. This time the father, a jobbing stone-mason, had not only broken his leg in Marseilles, but on coming out of the hospital had got drunk, assaulted a gend’arme, made a compound fracture of it, and laid himself up for several months. This time the mother had a rheumatic swelling of one arm, which hindered her in her washing. This time the eldest boy had got himself into some trouble in trying to evade the performance of his term of military duty. This time the youngest child had some torturing disease of the spine that necessitated—or rather needed—an operation. And, of course,

as at all times, there were five or six hungry mouths, associated with as many pairs of comparatively helpless hands, between Virginie and that youngest. And as to business, that was certainly bad. It was particularly bad of late—although it was always bad in Drignan. Virginie told Mr. Egg that he was “rudement propre,” or “blazing clean”—clean as they were not in Drignan, she assured him. In fact, it appeared, this strange English gentleman, who had paid as high as a franc-and-a-half a week for his washing, had been accepted by Virginie’s family as designed in the mercy of Divine Providence to tide them over their period of distress. His departure at the end of two weeks was a sore disappointment in a financial point of view.

Vincent Egg was a very kind-hearted man, and he listened to this recital, and uttered sympathetic ejaculations in the right places. He was sorry about the youngest child, very sorry; he had known a case like it. Perhaps, he suggested, business might pick up. Messrs. Sculry & Co., the great English managers of Tourists’ Excursions, were going to make Drignan a stopping-place for their excursions on the way to Avignon. It was going to be a stopping-place of only a few hours, but, perhaps, it might bring some business. Who knew? Virginie brightened up when she heard this, and said that was so. Those English, she remarked, were always washing—no disrespect intended to the gentleman.

“And here,” she said, as they came abreast

of a narrow gateway on the other side of the street from Mr. Egg's lodging-house, "is where I live. It is on the ground floor. Will Monsieur come in and see the baby?" And her eyes lit up for the first time with a real interest—the interest, half-proud, and half-morbid, of a poor, simple creature who longs to exhibit to the world the affliction of monstrosity which sets her poor household apart from others of its kind.

Now, Mr. Egg had not the slightest desire to see the baby, and he had no intention whatever of going in; but, glancing through the narrow doorway, he saw a succession of arches in the courtyard beyond, and some old bits of mediæval masonry, which excited his curiosity. If this were the remains of some old monastery that had escaped his notice, it might mean a half-page more—nine-pence—in his guide-book. He strolled in by Virginie's side, heedless of her chatter. No; it was not the ruin of an ecclesiastical structure. The courtyard was only a part of an old stable and blacksmith shop; old, but no older probably than the rest of that old street, which might have been standing at the time of Louis XIV—though it probably wasn't. From its proximity to a canal that marked the line of an old moat, Mr. Egg made a safe guess that it was a small remnant of the stables and farriery attached to the barracks of the original fortifications of the town.

At any rate, it was no fish for the net of Messrs. Sculry & Co.'s guide-book compiler; and he was turning to go, when Virginie, who had supposed

that he was merely following in her lead, to feast his eyes upon the sick baby, said simply, as she pushed open a door, "This way, Monsieur," and, before he knew it, he had entered his washer-woman's room.

Although it was a ground-floor room, damp, dark and old, it was clean with a curious sort of cleanness that seems to belong to the Latin races—a cleanness that gives one the impression of having been achieved without the use of soap and water; as if everything had been scraped clean instead of being washed clean. Virginie's mother was clean, too, in spite of her swollen and helpless arm, and the three or four children who were playing on the stone floor were no dirtier than healthy children ought to be between washes. But Mr. Egg had hardly had time to take more than cursory notes of these facts before his attention was riveted by the sick child in the French woman's arms—so pitiful a little piece of suffering childhood that a much harder-hearted man than Mr. Vincent Egg might readily have been shocked at the sight of it. As for Mr. Egg, he simply dropped into a seated posture upon a convenient bench, and stared in the fascination of pity and horror.

Mr. Egg knew little of children and less of their diseases. In the ordinary course of things, such matters were not often brought to his attention; and, to tell the truth, had he known what he was to see there, no persuasion would have induced him to enter that poor little room. Now

that he did see it, however, he could not move his eyes; the spectacle had for him a hideous attraction of novelty. Virginie and her mother exhibited the poor little misshapen thing, and rattled over the history of the case with a volubility which showed that it was no new tale. For fifteen minutes their visitor sat and stared in horrified silence; and, when at last he made his way back to the street, he found that his mind was in a more disturbed state than he had known it to be in many years.

It is the people who most avoid the sight of human suffering who very often are the most sharply shocked by it when that sight is obtruded upon them. Your professional nurse soon learns to succor without lamentation; it is the person who "really has no faculty for nursing" who goes into spasms of sensibility over the sight of a finger caught in a cog-wheel, and runs about clamoring for new laws for the suppression of all machinery not constructed of India-rubber. Up to half an hour before, Mr. Egg had never wasted many thoughts upon the millions of suffering babies in this world; and now he could not turn his thoughts to anything except the particular baby that he had just seen.

And yet, as he had told Virginie, he had known of a similar case before, though it belonged to a time so long ago that it had practically faded from his mind. It was the case of his own brother, who had died in infancy of some such trouble, one of the earliest victims of an operation at that

time in its earliest experimental stages. That was more than half a century ago, and Vincent Egg had no remembrance whatever of the little brother. But he did remember his first childish impression of a visit to the hospital where the little one lay—of the smell of the disinfectants and the chill of the whitewashed walls.

The heart of Mr. Egg was touched, and he felt himself moved with a strong desire to extend some help to these people who were so much worse off than he was. Yet Mr. Egg's intellectual parts told him that there was no possibility of his doing anything of the sort. He knew, beyond any chance of fond delusion, his present position and his future prospects. He had his ticket back to Lyons, where the local branch of Messrs. Sculry & Co. had its office; he had in his valise at his lodgings just enough money for his necessary sustenance upon his journey. And not one other penny, not one soumarkee would he have until, at Messrs. Sculry & Co.'s office, his work had been measured down to the last syllable, and he had received therefor as many times eighteen-pence as he had produced pages. That would be, it was true, quite a neat little sum, but—and here came in the big BUT of Mr. Egg's existence.

For Mr. Egg knew exactly what was going to become of that money. To draw it at all, he would have to present himself at the office in a condition of sobriety, which would be the last effort of a period of abstinence that he was beginning to find very trying. Then, so much of it must go to buy-

ing himself back into the three or four attenuated credits by grace of which he lived his poor life at Lyons; and just enough would be left to give him that fortnight of drunken stupor for which he had worked so long and so hard.

Mr. Egg needed an effort rather of the memory than of the imagination to forecast the recurrence of that familiar stupor. He could see himself leaving the spick-and-span, highly respectable office of the Lyons agency of Messrs. Sculry & Co., and hurrying off upon the few bits of business that must be attended to before he could present himself at "his" wine-shop, which was a very dirty one, indeed, kept by a certain M. and Mme. Louis Morel, in an appropriately unclean back street. There he knew just what to expect in the way of noisy, ready-handed, false-faced welcome. Then would come the tantalizingly-prolonged bargaining over the score to be settled and the score to be begun, and at last he would be free to take possession of that dark, ill-ventilated little back room which was always reserved for the periodical retirements of this regular patron of the house. It was a little room like a ship's stateroom, hardly large enough to contain its dirty red velvet divan, its round table and its two chairs; yet for a week or a fortnight it would be his, and behind it, in the hallway, was a bed on which he could stretch himself in the hours when he felt the need of deeper slumber than the hard cushions of the divan permitted. There his few friends, outcasts and adventurers like himself, would drop in to

see him, one or two at a time, to help him on his murky way with challenges to bouts of brandy-drinking, in which he would always pay for two glasses to the other man's one. Then, as the procession of callers went on, it would grow dim and dimmer and vague and yet more vague, until it was lost in a hazy, wavering dream, wherein familiar faces of men and women stared at him from out of days so long gone by that in his dream he could fancy them happy.

That was what lay before him. Mr. Vincent Egg knew it as well as he knew that the calendar months would go on in their regular order, and the tides in the sea would continue to rise and fall. Under these circumstances, nothing was more certain than that the unfortunate family of Mr. Egg's washerwoman need look for no help whatever from Mr. Egg's prospective earnings. "It's a damned shame!" said Mr. Egg to himself, slapping his thigh. And it was a shame. But there it was.

Suddenly a great thought struck Mr. Egg—a thought so great and so forcible in the blow that it dealt his mental apprehension that for three minutes he stood stock-still in the gutter in the middle of the rue des Quatre Mulets. Then somebody poured a pail of water out of a doorway and drowned him out, but he went on his way, quite indifferent to wet feet.

Mr. Vincent Egg went to his lodgings, and there extracted from his valise the very small sum of money which he had laid aside for his necessary

sustenance on his trip to Lyons. This he took to a sign-painter on the outskirts of Drignan, to whom he paid the whole of it for the execution of a small but conspicuous sign-board, which he carried away with him under his arm.

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The usual afternoon wind was blowing in Drignan, chill and raw, with a depressing flavor of a spoilt ocean about it. The sky was overcast, and everything was dismal in the dismal little town. Dismalest of all, perhaps, was a wretched little corner of waste land, between the old barrack-wall and the dirty canal behind it. A few sick, stunted, faded olive and orange trees in the lee of a mean stone wall showed that the place had at one time been a garden or courtyard. Heaps of rubbish here and there showed also that it had long outlived its usefulness. Here sat, one on each side of a tiny fire of twigs a shabby, soldierly-looking old gentleman and a sallow, lanky young girl with a sullenly pretty face. Right in the sluggish smoke of the fire, the old man held a small sign-board still fresh from the painter's hand, and the more the smoke took the brightness out of the new colors, the more he gazed at it with thoughtful approval. The girl said nothing; but sat and stared at the fire and listened with an air of weary and indifferent toleration while the old man repeated over and over what sounded like a monotonous narrative recitation. From time to time she nodded her head; and, at

last, she began to repeat after the old man in a listless, mechanical way. It was late in the afternoon before they rose and scrambled over the heaps of rubbish to the street, where the old gentleman bade the girl good-by with what were evidently words of earnest admonition. His iteration seemed to annoy her, for finally she let slip, in a tone of anger, a specimen of the speech of the people which wasn't exactly this, though at this we will let it go:

“Vous savez, mons vieux, je m'en fiche bien de votre Pé—Pé—Pétrarque—et de votre Laure aussi—”

Then she as quickly dropped back into her natural tone of hopeless submission to all who were less wretched than herself, and said, with something like gratitude in her voice:

“All the same, it is very kind of you, sir. I will try to do as you have told me.”

And they parted, she entering a near-by passage-way, and he going to the railroad station.

Mr. Vincent Egg stood in the private office of the Lyons branch of Messrs. Sculry & Co., the great Excursion Managers. He was, for him, unusually smart as to his clothes—to those who knew him, a sign that he had reached the end of his period of abstinence. The Manager of the Branch, a thin, raw, red-faced little Englishman with sandy whiskers, was looking over the proofs of the guide-book pages set up from Mr. Egg's copy.

“Oh, ah, yes, Egg!” he said; “I knew there was something particular I wanted to speak to you about. Here it is.” And he slowly read aloud:

“Another and perhaps the principal attraction of Drignan is the ruin, pathetic in its dignity, of the mansion of the Conte dei Canale, the exiled Venetian, where the immortal poet Petrarch and the no less immortal lady of his love, whom he has celebrated in undying verse, met secretly, in the year 1337, to bid each other a long and chaste farewell. News of the lovers’ design having reached the ears of de Sade, the husband of the beauteous Laura, his base mind suspected an elopement, and he dispatched his liveried minions to separate the pair, and, if possible, to immolate on the altar of his vengeance the gentle and talented poet. It is supposed to be in consequence of injuries received in the resultant struggle that Petrarch went into retirement for three years at Vacluse (a spot which no holder of Messrs. Sculry & Co.’s 7-9 extra-trip coupon should fail to see). This exquisite chapter in the lives of the lovers over whom so many tears of sentiment have been shed, has been strangely neglected by the historians; but survives undimmed in local tradition. A full account will be found on page 329. The house is now 47 *bis* rue des Quatres Mulets. Behind it may still be seen what remains of the magnificent orangery and olive-garden of the Conte dei Canale. Access to this is gained from

the second gateway from the corner of the Passage des Pores, and should not be confounded with the entrance to the Jardin de Perse, a resort of somewhat frivolous character, situated on the second crossing below, rue Clément V.”—

Here the Manager raised his head. “I suppose that’s for the men?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Egg; “that’s for the men.”

“Well,” said the Manager, “what about this other attraction, this Petrarch and Laura place?”

“Well,” said Mr. Egg, blinking at him, for it was still early in the morning; “there it is, as large as life, with a sign on the door that looks as if it had been there fifty years; and I’ll give it to you as my opinion that if you don’t work that attraction, the Novelty Excursion Company will jump in and work it for you.”

“Ay, ay!” said the Manager, irritably; “that’s all very well; but how about the fees? That excursion goes by way of Drignan to save money. The London office won’t thank me if I give them any extra fees to pay.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Egg, pleasantly; “is that all? Here, give me that proof.” And, taking the sheets from the Manager, he wrote as follows, on the margin:

“The mansion is at present owned by a respectable family who also do trustworthy washing. A polite, well-informed attendant is always ready to show the premises on payment of a moderate

fee of 35 centimes (31½ d.). Although no part of the regular excursion, the liberal time allowed by Messrs. Sculry & Co., for rest and refreshment in Drignan, will enable excursionists to visit this shrine of deathless romance."

The Manager took the amended proof back, and read it admiringly.

"By Jove, Egg!" he said; "that does it to the Queen's taste! An attraction like that, and not a penny's expense to the concern! I suppose, of course, really and truly, it's all Tommy-rot?"

"I suppose so," said Mr. Egg, pleasantly.

"Never was any such business, I suppose," went on the Manager.

"I don't believe it, myself," said Mr. Egg, shaking his head sagely.

"Well," said the Manager, "it's all right for business, so far as the Avignon tour is concerned. And, oh! I say, Egg, I don't suppose you *could* keep permanently straight, could you?"

"At my time of life," said Mr. Egg, blandly, "a gentleman's habits are apt to be fixed."

"I suppose so," sighed the Manager. "Well, all the same, the London office was very much pleased with the last job you did, Egg, and they have authorized me, at my discretion, to increase your honorarium. We'll make it a shilling a page, beginning with the present."

When Mr. Vincent Egg reached the street, he looked at the unexpected pile of wealth in his hand.

“This is a three weeks’ go at elysium,” said he to himself; “such as I haven’t had in many a year. And, so far as I am concerned, it is the Fruit of Falsification, and the Wage of Sin.”

But when Mr. Egg next awoke from his period of slumber in M. Morel’s back-room, and stretched himself upon the hard cushion of the red velvet divan, throngs of gawking tourists were trying to steep themselves in sentiment as they gazed about the old room off the rue des Quatres Mulets, and looked over the wall at the faded orange and olive trees, and listened to the story which Virginie told, like a talking-doll, and dropped into her hand a welcome stream of copper or silver, according as they were English or Americans.

THE GHOOLLAH

I TOOK a long drive one day last Summer to see an old friend of mine who was in singularly hard luck; and I found him in even harder luck and more singular than I had expected. My drive took me to a spot a few miles back of a Southern sea-coast, where, in a cup-like hollow of the low, rocky hills, treeless save for stunted and distorted firs and pines, six or eight score of perspiring laborers, attired in low-necked costumes consisting exclusively of a pair of linen trousers a-piece, toil all day in the blazing sun to dig out some kind of clay of which I know nothing, except that it looks mean, smells worse, has a name ending in *ite*, and is of great value in the arts and sciences. They may make fertilizer out of it, or they may make water-colors: Billings told me, but I don't know. There are some things that one forgets almost as readily as a blow to one's pride. Moreover, this stuff was associated in my mind with Big Mitch.

Of course Billings was making a fortune out of it. But as it would take six or eight years to touch the figure he had set for himself, and as he had no special guarantee of an immortal youth on this earth, and as, until the fortune was made, he had to live all the year around in that god-

forsaken spot, and to live with Big Mitch, moreover, I looked upon him as a man in uncommonly hard luck. And he was.

I had been visiting friends in a town some miles inland, and it had occurred to me that it would be an act of Christian charity to drive over the hills to Billings's place of servitude, and to condole with my old friend. I had nothing else to do—a circumstance always favorable to the perpetration of acts of Christian charity—and I went. He was enthusiastically glad to see me—I was the first visitor he had ever had—and he left his office at once, and led me up the burning hot sand-hill to his house, which was a very comfortable sort of place when you got there. It was an old-fashioned Southern house, small but stately, with a Grecian portico in front, supported by two-story wooden pillars. Here he was established in lonely luxury, with no one to love, none to caress, swarms of darkeys, and a cellar full of wines that would have tempted the Dying Anchorite to swill. Casually dispatching half a dozen niggers after as many bottles of champagne as they thought we might need to whet or appetites for luncheon, Billings bade me welcome again, and we fell to friendly talk.

He began with that kind of apology for his condition that speaks its own futility; and its despair of credence. Of course, he said, it was not a very cheerful sort of life, but it had its compensations—quiet, good for the nerves, opportunity for study and all that sort of thing, self-

improvement. And then, of course, there was society, such as it was—mainly, he had to admit, the superannuated bachelors and worn-out old maids who clung to those decaying Southern plantations—for, it is hardly necessary to say, not an acre of property in that forlorn region, save only Billings's mud-bank, had yielded a cent of revenue since the war. And, of course, the unpleasant part of it was that none of them lived less than ten or fifteen miles away, and were only to be reached by a long ride, and as he—Billings—was never at ease in the saddle, on account of his liver, this practically shut him out. But then, of course, Mitch went everywhere, and enjoyed it very much.

“Oh, yes!” said I, reminded of the most unpleasant part of my duty; “and how is Mitch?”

“He's dirty well, and it's devilish little you care!” brayed out an incredibly brazen voice just behind my ear, and a big red hand snatched the bottle of champagne from my grasp, while a laugh, that sounded like a hyena trying to bellow, rang in my ears. A great, big, raw-boned youngster, dressed in clothes of an ingenious vulgarity, dropped heavily into a chair by my side and laid a knobby broad red hand on my knee, where it closed with a brutal grip. That was Big Mitch, whose real name was Randolph Mitchel, and who being by birth a distant connection of dear old Billings, might reasonably have been expected to be some sort or variety of gentleman. Yet, if you wanted to sum up Big Mitch, his ways, man-

ners, tastes, ideas and spiritual make-up generally,—if he could be said to have any spiritual make-up,—you had only to say that he was all that a gentleman is not, and you had a better descriptive characterization of the man than you could have got in a volume telling just what he was. This was not by any means my first acquaintance with Mr. Randolph Mitchel. When I was a young man his father had stood my friend, and though he had dropped out of my sight when he went, a hopeless consumptive, to vegetate in some Western sanitarium, it was natural enough that he should send to me to use my good offices in behalf of his son, who had been expelled from a well-known fresh-water college of the Atlantic slope, very shortly after he had entered it.

Now I am not a hard-hearted man, and a boy with a reasonable, rational, normal amount of devil in him can do pretty nearly anything he wants to with me; therefore it signifies something when I say that after giving up a week to the business, I had to write to poor old Mr. Mitchel, at the Consumptives' Home, Bilhi, Colorado, not only that was it impossible to get his son Randolph reinstated at that particular college, but that I did not believe that there was any college ever made where the boy had a prospect of staying even one term out. It was not that he was vicious; he was no worse on the purely moral side than scores of wild boys. But he was the most hopelessly, irreclaimably turbulent, riotous, unruly, insolent, brutal, irreverent, unmannerly and

generally blackguardly young devil that I had ever encountered; and the entire faculty of the college said, in their own scholastic way, that he beat *their* time. He had not even the saving graces of good-nature, thoughtlessness and mirthful good-fellowship, which may serve as excuse for much youthful waywardness. The students disliked him as thoroughly as their professors did, and although he was smart as a steel trap and capable of any amount of work when he wanted to do it, nobody in that college wanted him,—*not even the captain of the football team.*

Was I right? Had I wronged the boy? I asked that captain, and he said No.

Big Mitch was only twenty-three or so, but he had been many things in his young life. He had run away and traveled with a circus. He had been a helper in a racing stable. I don't know what he was when his father made a last desperate appeal to poor Billings, and Billings, who did not know what he was letting himself in for, sent him down to start up work on the recently purchased mud-pit. There Mitch found his billet, and he led a life of absolute happiness, domineering over a horde of helpless, ignorant negroes, and white men of an even lower grade who sought work in that wretched place. And what a life he led the dear, gentle, kindly old fellow who had sold himself to fortune-getting in that little Inferno! I knew how Billings must loathe him; I knew, indeed, how he did loathe him, though he was too gentle to say it, but I knew that the

burden my poor old friend had put upon himself would not soon be shifted. For Big Mitch was useful, nay, indispensable, for the first time in his life. He was as honest as he was tough, and he could handle that low grade of human material as few others could have done. The speculation would have been a failure without him. "In fact," Billings told me afterward with a sad smile, "it is not only that he raises the efficient of the works; he *is* the efficient of the works."

Big Mitch never bore me the slightest ill-will for the report I had made to his father. He was too indurated an Ishmael for that. He knew everybody disliked him, but he did not care a cent for that. When he wanted other people's company, he *took* it. The question of their enjoyment was one that never entered his mind. It was in pure delight in seeing me that he grabbed my knee, pinched my knee-cap until it sent a qualm to my stomach, and told me that he had ordered my driver to go home, and that I had got to stay and see the country. Things came pretty near to a lively squall when I got the impudence of this through my head; but when Billings joined his frightened, anxious pleadings to the youth's brutalities, and I saw his humbled, troubled, mortified face, I yielded.

We were free from Mitch after luncheon, and poor Billings began to make a pitiful little apology; but I stopped him.

"I don't mind," I said; "I was only thinking of *you*."

“Oh, I’ve got accustomed to it,” he said, trying to smile; “and it’s really more tolerable than you would think, when you get to know him. And when he is too—too trying—why, there is one place that he understands he must respect. Come to my library. You are the first person who has ever entered it except myself.”

He led me to the door of a room at the end of a dark passage-way. As he put the key in the lock I noticed a curious smell.

“I want you to see,” said he, “the sort of thing I’m interested in.”

I had not been five seconds in the room before I knew what it was—the sort of thing he was interested in. Loneliness breeds strange mag-gots in the brain of a New Yorker temporarily engaged in the mud-mining business. My old friend Billings was now a full-blown Theosophist, and he had that little room stuffed full of more Mahatma-literature and faquir trumpery than you could shake a stick at. There were skulls and fans and grass-cloth things and heathen gods till—literally—your eyes couldn’t rest. There were four-legged gods and eight-legged gods, and gods with their legs where their arms ought to be, and gods who were of the gentleman-god and lady-god sex at one and the same time, and gods with horns and miscellaneous gods, and a few other gods. In odd places here and there, where he had not had time to arrange them properly, there were a few more gods.

And then my poor old friend sat down and tried

to put me through the whole business, and tell me what a great and mysterious thing it was, and what a splendid scheme it would be to get into the two-hundred and ninety-seventh state or the thirtieth dilution or the thirty-third degree, or something, for when you got there you were nothing, don't you know?

I was short on Vishnu and I didn't know beans about Buddha, and for a long time, I am afraid, I gave dear old Billings a great deal of grief. But finally I began to get a new light, and Billings convinced me that there was something in it, and we had some more champagne.

That evening Mitch came for us with a carry-all, and said he was going to drive us twenty miles inland to a "dancing-in-the-barn" function on somebody's plantation. I proved to him then and there that he was not. Billings nearly melted into a puddle while the operation was going on. He could scarcely believe his eyes when he saw Big Mitch drive off alone, and I think he had a slight chill. At any rate, he had the champagne brought to the library, and there he told me that he had not believed such a thing to be possible; that he looked upon me in a new light, and that he thought my *Ghoollah* must be stronger than Mitch's *Ghoollah*. I told him that I should be ashamed of myself if it wasn't; and then I asked him what a *Ghoollah* was. Please do not ask me if I have spelled that word right. I am spelling it by ear, and if my ear for Hindoo is as bad as my ear for music, I have probably got it wrong.

It sounded something like the noise that pigeons make, and that is as near as I can get to it. According to Billings, it was Hindoo for my vital essence and my will power and my conscience and my immortal soul and pretty nearly every other spiritual property that I carried around in my clothes. Everyone, it appeared, had a *Ghoollah*. If your Ghoollah was stronger than the other man's Ghoollah, you bossed the other man. If you had a good and happy Ghoollah, you were good and happy. If you had a bad Ghoollah, you were bilious. If my Theosophy is wrong, please do not correct it. I prefer it wrong. I told him that I did not see that having a Ghoollah was anything more than being yourself, but he said it was; that folks could swap Ghoollahs, or lend them out on call loans.

Then it all came out. That was the reason that he was driving deeper and deeper into Theosophy. He had got so sick of Mitch that, feeling it impossible to shake off his burden, he had seized upon this Ghoollah idea as offering a ray of hope. He was now trying to learn how to get into spiritual communication with somebody—*anybody*—else, who would swap Ghoollahs with him after business hours, so that they could ride-and-tie, as it were, and give his own weary Ghoollah a rest.

“Look here, Billings,” I said, “this is all rubbish. Now, I’m not dealing in Ghoollahs, but I’ll tell you what I’ll do. You can find some sort of a job here for a decent young fellow, and I’ll send

one down who'll be grateful for the place and who will be a companion to you. It's Arthur Penrhyn, Dr. Penrhyn's boy; a nice, pleasant young fellow—just what his father used to be, you remember? He was to have graduated at Union this year, but he broke down from over-study. That's the kind of Ghoolah *you* want, and he'll do you no end of good."

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This happened in June. I had never expected to see Billings's mud-heap again, but I saw it before the end of July. I went there because Billings had written me that if I cared for him and our life-long friendship, and for poor Penrhyn's boy, I must come at once. He could not explain by letter what the matter was.

It added to my natural concern when, on my arrival, Billings hurried me into the library and I found it as theosophic as ever. I had hoped that that nonsense was ended. But worse was to come.

"When you were here before," said Billings, impressively, without having once mentioned champagne, "you scoffed at a light which you couldn't see. Now, my friend, I am going to let you see it with your own eyes, and you shall tell me whether or no you are convinced that it is possible for one human being to exchange his entity with another. If I have brought you here on a wild goose chase, I am willing to have you procure a judicial examination into my sanity, and I will abide the issue."

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He spoke with so much quiet gravity that he made me feel creepy.

"See here, old man," I said; "do you mean to tell me that you have succeeded in pairing off with any other fellow's Ghoollah, or Woollah, or whatever it is?"

"No," he said, coloring a little; "it's not I. It's—it's—it's—in fact, it's that boy Penrhyn."

"What the deuce do you mean?" I demanded.

"I mean that Arthur Penrhyn has changed, or, rather, is changing his spiritual essence with another man."

"Indeed," said I; "and who's the other man?"

"Randolph Mitchel," said Billings.

"Mitch?"

"Mitch!"

There is no need of describing the rest of that interview. You have probably met the man who believes that the spirit of his grandmother came out of the cabinet and shook hands with him. You can probably imagine how you would talk to that man if he had brought you eight hundred miles to tell you about it. That is what happened in Billings's library that afternoon, and it ended, of course, in our calling each other "old man" a great many times over, and in my agreeing to stay to the end of the week, and in Billings giving me his word of honor not to open his mouth on the subject unless at the end of that time I asked him to and admitted that he was right in sending for me. And then Billings did something that knocked my consciousness of superiority clean

out of me, and gave a severe shock to my confidence. He offered to bet me five hundred dollars to anything that would make it interesting on that contingency, and he called me down and down till I had to compromise on a bet of fifty dollars even. I have met many men in the course of my life who believed in various spook-religions, but that was the first and only time that I ever met a man who would back his faith with a cold money bet.

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By way of changing the subject, we strolled down to the quarry. It was even hotter than before, and it smelt worse, and I did not wonder that it had driven poor old Billings to Theosophy. It was a scene of interesting activity, but it could not be called pleasant. I have a great respect for the dignity of labor, but I think labor looks more dignified with its shirt on than when reduced to a lone pair of breeches.

I was about to make a motion to return to the house, when suddenly a string of peculiarly offensive oaths, uttered in a shrill angry voice, drew my attention to a heavy wire rope which a gang of men were hauling across my path. Looking up I saw, as well as I could see anything, against the dazzling background of the hill, a short, insignificant-looking figure perched on a rock, from whence it directed, with many gesticulations and an abounding stream of profanity, the operations of the toiling, grunting, straining creatures who

dragged at the ponderous cable. Its operations seemed to be conducted with more vehemence than judgment, and two or three times the rope was on the edge of slipping back into the pit behind, when it was saved by the men's quick response to some directions given in a low, strong voice by a man who stood in my rear. Some little hitch occurred after a minute or two, and the small figure, in an access of rage, rushed down from the rock, and, showering imprecations all around, leaped in among the workmen, pushing, shoving and cuffing, and after considerable trouble finally got them to doing what he wanted. I heard the heavier voice behind me utter half-aloud an expression of annoyance and disgust. Then the little figure passed me, running back to its rock, and hailed me as it passed.

"Hello, Governor!" it said; "you here? See you when I get this job done!"

"Billings," said I, "who on earth is that?"

"Arthur Penrhyn," said Billings. I looked again and saw that it was. Then I turned round and saw behind me the gigantic form of Mitch. He, too, spoke to me as I passed, and with a look of simple pleasure in his face that made it seem absolutely strange to me.

"Glad to see you, Sir," he said.

Sir!

.

"It's a most remarkable case altogether," said Billings, who had got back to his normal self,

and had brought out the champagne. "When that boy came here he was just as you described him—just like his poor father in the days when we first knew each other. He brooded a little too much, and seemed discontented; but, considering his disappointment at college, that was natural enough. Well, do you know, I believe it's he that's doing the whole thing, and that he is effecting the substitution for his own ends, though I don't know what they are."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "he wants his Ghoolah to get the job away from Mitch's Ghoolah."

"Ahem!" said Billings, looking a little embarrassed; "I—in fact, I've discovered that the best Pundits do not use that word. It ought to be—"

Here Billings gave me the correct word; but I draw the line at Ghoolah, and Ghoolah it stays while I am telling this story.

"He hadn't been here a week before I noticed that he kept his eyes fixed on Mitch all the time they were together. He looked at him as though he were actually trying to absorb him. Before long, I saw that Mitch began to be troubled under that steady gaze. He seemed at first angry, then distressed, and he had long fits of silence. His boisterousness has been vanishing steadily; but it is not sullenness that he displays—on the contrary, I have never known him so gentle. He is just as efficient in his duties, without being so extremely—demonstrative as he used to be. And as for that other boy, who probably had never uttered a profane word in his life, or spoken

rudely to any human being—well, you heard him to-day!”

I made up my mind to try to drink fifty dollars' worth of Billings's champagne before the end of the week to even up on my bet; and, as the days went on, each new development only served to urge me to greater assiduity in the task. The spirit of Big Mitch looked out of little Arthur Penrhyn's insolent eyes, spoke out of his foul mouth, and showed itself even in tricks of gesture and carriage, and in lines of facial expression. And Big Mitch, though his huge, uncouth frame and coarse lineaments lent themselves but ill to the showing of it, carried within him a new spirit of gentleness and humility. We saw little of him, for after work hours he kept persistently to his room. But once, late at night, seeing him, through his open door, asleep over a book, I stepped softly in and looked over his big shoulders at the half-dozen volumes that littered his table. They were college text-books, and on the fly-leaf of each one was the name of Arthur Penrhyn.

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I had packed my valise, and was looking for Billings to pay him his fifty dollars, when Big Mitch came out of his room—it was the noon hour—and he asked me for the favor of a few words.

“I am ashamed to trouble you, sir,” he said, “but if you could help me to get any sort of a

job in New York, or anywhere else, I'd be more thankful than I could tell you. I can afford to take almost any sort of a place where there's a future, for I am pretty well ahead of the game financially, and I've earned my interest in this concern. And it's in such shape now that Mr. Billings can get along without me."

"But, my dear boy," I said, "why do you *want* to go?"

Big Mitch frowned and fidgeted nervously; then he exploded.

"I'll give it to you straight," he said. "It's that Penrhyn pup. When he first came here I thought I was just about the nicest little man on God's footstool. I was as contented with myself as a basket of eggs. I knew it all. I was so sharp you could cut glass with me. I was the only real sport in the outfit. See? And I'd got a roving commission to jump on people's necks. Well, *you* know what I was. And I liked myself. See?"

"But?" I began. "Arthur Penrhyn—"

"*So did he!* I don't believe any one in the world was ever stuck on me before, but *he* was. That little ape hadn't been here a week before he began to do everything he saw me do, and pretty soon he had me down so fine that he might have been my twin-brother, if we ever had such runts in our family. Well, I began to sour on the show. Understand? I could see for myself it wasn't pretty. Well, one day I came around a corner, and there was that baboon sassing back

to old man Billings. I was just going to pick him up and break his neck, when I felt kind of sick at my stomach, and I says to myself, 'You swine! that's the way *you*'ve been treating that white man! How do you like yourself now?' "

Bit Mitch clutched desperately at his rumpled hair.

"I'm going to be a gentleman," he grunted, "if I have to chew gravel to do it. I'll do it, though, and I'll show up some day and surprise the old man before he cashes in his last lung. But if I don't get a fresh start pretty soon, I'll do something to that Penrhyn monkey that won't be any young lady's dancing-class, you bet your boots!"

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I told Billings. First he paid me fifty dollars. Then he made a bonfire of all his theosophic outfit. Then he went down to the quarry and announced that he was his own boss from that time on; and by way of a sample demonstration he called up Arthur Penrhyn and knocked the everlasting Ghoollah out of him. Then he came back to the house and looked at the thermometer.

To this day, I never see champagne without thinking of drinking some.

CUTWATER OF SENECA

THE story I am about to tell is hardly a story at all. Perhaps I had better call it a report, and let it go at that, with a word of explanation as to how I came to report it.

In 1884 a new state survey and a new re-districting act between them cut off about one-quarter of a northern timber county close to the Canada border, and delivered over the severed portion to its neighbor on the southerly side, a thickly settled county with several large towns and with important manufacturing interests. This division left the backwoods county temporarily without a judiciary or a place of holding court. But the act provided for the transfer of all pending cases to the courts of the more fortunate county down below, and gave the backwoods District Attorney the privilege of trying in the said courts such cases as might arise in his own bailiwick during his term of office then current.

No such cases occurred, however, until the period stated by the act was nearly at an end, when the District Attorney of the mutilated county came down to Metropole, our County Seat, to try a murder case. As our backwoods neighbors were

a somewhat untrammelled, uncouth and free-and-easy folk at their quietest, his coming naturally attracted some curious interest, especially after it became known that he had come into town sitting side by side with the prisoner in the smoking-car, and discussing politics with him. His name was Judge Cutwater, and he was generally spoken of as Cutwater of Seneca—perhaps because he had at some time been a Judge in Seneca, New York; perhaps because there was no comprehensible reason for so calling him, any more than there was comprehensible reason for various and sundry other things about him.

He was a man who might have been sixty or seventy or eighty. Indeed, he might have been a hundred, and he may be now, for all I know. But he was lean, wiry, agile, supple and full of eternal youth. He might have been good-looking if he had cared to be, for he had a fine old-fashioned eagle face, and a handsome, flowing gray moustache, the grace of which was spoiled by a straggling thin wisp of chin whiskers, and a patch of gray stubble on each cheek. And, of course, he chewed tobacco profusely and diffusely, and in his long, grease-stained, shiny broadcloth coat, his knee-bagged breeches, his big slouch hat, and his eye-glasses with heavy black horn rims, suspended from his neck by a combination of black ribbon and pink string, he looked what he was, as clearly as though he had been labelled—the representative of the Majesty of the Law among a backwoods people out of odds with for-

tune, desperate, disheartened, down on their luck, and lost to self-respect.

He said he was a good Democrat, and I think he was. He saw the prisoner locked up, bade him a kindly "Good night, Jim," and ordered the jailer to let him have all the whiskey he wanted. Then Judge Cutwater called on his brother of the local bench, greeting him with a ceremonious and stately dignity that absolutely awed the excellent old gentleman, and dropping an enormous Latin quotation on him as he departed, just by way of utterly flattening him out. After that he strolled over to the hotel, grasped the landlord warmly by the hand, and in the space of half an hour told him a string of stories of such startling novelty, humor and unfitness for publication that, as the landlord enthusiastically declared, the recent Drummers' Convention could not be said to be "in it" with the old man.

The next day the case of Jim Adsum for the murder of his mate in a logging camp was called in court; and District Attorney Cutwater's trying of it was a circus that nearly drove old Judge Potter into an apoplectic fit, and kept the whole court room in what both those eminent jurists united—it was the only thing they *did* unite in—in characterizing as a disgraceful uproar.

And yet, somehow, by four o'clock he had evidence enough in to convict the prisoner; the defence had not a single exception worth the noting, and was rattled as to its state of mind; and that weird old prosecutor, who repeatedly spoke of the

prisoner at the bar as "Jim," and made no secret of the fact that they had been bosom friends and companions in the forest, had worked up a case that made the best lawyers in the room stare at him with looks of puzzled surprise and amazed respect.

When he rose to sum up, he slowly and thoughtfully drew a tin tobacco-box from his trousers' pocket, opened it and deposited therein his quid, after passing his right hand, with a rapid and skillful motion, across his gray moustache. This feat he performed with a dignity that at once fascinated and awed the beholder. Then he began:

"Your Honor *and* Gentlemen of the Jury: It is a rare and a seldom occurrence that a prosecuting official, sworn to exert his utmost energies to further the execution of the law, is called upon to invoke the awful vengeance of that law, and the retribution demanded by outraged humanity, upon the head of one under whose blanket he has lain within the cold hollows of the snow-clad woods; with whom he has shared the meager food of the pioneer; side by side with whom he has struggled for his rights and his liberties, at the daily and hourly risk of his life, with half-breed Injuns and with half-breeder Kanucks. Sech, gentlemen, is the duty that lies before this servant of the Law to-day; and sech, gentlemen, is the duty that will be done, without fear or favor, without consideration of friendship or hallowed association; and this man, Jim Adsum, knows it,

knowing me, as well as he ever knew anything in the fool life that is now drawing to a close.

“You have heard, Gentlemen of the Jury, the evidence that has been laid before you on the part of the prosecution, and you have heard the attempt made by the learned counsel for the defence to discredit that evidence in his eloquent but frivolous opening on behalf of his unfortunate client. I trust that you have given to the one the appreciative attention which it deserves, and that you have let the other slip, naked and shivering, into the boundless oblivion of your utter contempt.

“What, Gentlemen of the Jury, are the circumstances of this case? We learn by the testimony for the people that on the twenty-seventh of November a party of seven men started off for the upper waters of the Sagus River, some to join a lumber camp, and others, among them this defendant, James Adsum, and his victim, Peter Biaux, a Frenchman, in the pursuit of their usual vocation—which may be said to be hunting for fur-skins, on general principles. This party of seven men is snowed up, and goes into camp at the junction of Sagus and First Rivers, and for eleven days remains thus snow-bound in that icy solitude, the only human beings within hundreds of miles.

“There has been, Gentlemen of the Jury, as has been shown to you, an old grudge between the prisoner at the bar and the deceased; a grudge of many years’ standing. There is no use of going into the origin of that grudge. Some says

it was cards; some, business; some, drink; and I personally know that it was a woman; but that makes no difference before this present tribunal. Let it be enough that there was bad blood between the men; that it broke forth, as two witnesses have told you, day after day, within the confines of that little camp crowded within its snow-bound arena in the heart of the immeasurable solitudes of the wintry forest. Again and again the other members of the party intervened to make peace between them. At last, upon the eighth day of December, matters come to a crisis, and a personal encounter ensued between the two men, in the course of which the deceased, being a Frenchman, is badly mauled, and Jim, here, being without his knife, through carelessness, is correspondingly cut. The two are separated; and, for fear of further mischief, the Frenchman is sent down the river to fish through the ice, and the prisoner is kept in the camp. That night, by order of the head of the party, he sleeps between two men. These two men have told you their story—how one of them woke in the night at the sound, as he thought, of a distant shot, and became aware that Adsum was no longer at his side—how, reaching out his hand, he grasped another hand, and taking it for the prisoner's, was reassured and fell asleep again—and how, weeks afterward, he first found out that that hand was the hand of the man who had been detailed to sleep on the other side of the prisoner. You have heard, gentlemen, how

these two men awoke in the morning to find Adsum lying between them, shaking and shivering with a chill under his heavy blanket. You have heard of the long and unsuccessful search for Peter Biaux, and of the accidental discovery of his mangled body three months later, under the ice of the Sagus River, at a point ten miles below the camp. You have heard how each of these witnesses was haunted by a suspicion that he had unwittingly betrayed the trust reposed in him, and how, at last, when they spoke together of their watch on that fatal night, their suspicion flashed, illumined with the fire of heaven's truth, into a hijjus certainty.

“You have been told, gentlemen, that the case of the people rests upon circumstantial evidence. It does, gentlemen; it does; and the circumstances are all there. You have heard how when these two witnesses exchanged notes, they came to one conclusion, and that is the conclusion to which I shall bring your minds. The witness Duncan said to the witness Atwood: ‘Jim done it!’ The witness Atwood replied to him: ‘Jim done it!’ And I say to you, Gentlemen of the Jury: ‘Jim *done* it!’ And you done it, Jim; you know you did!

“And now, gentlemen, what sort of a man is this prisoner at the bar? We must consider him for the purposes of this trial as two men—on the one hand, as the brave, upright and courageous trapper which he has on numberless occasions, to my personal knowledge, shown himself

to be—and I may say to you, Gentlemen of the Jury, that I would not be here talking to you now if he had not a-been on one or two occasions. And on the other hand, Gentlemen of the Jury, I am going to show him to you as the red-handed murderer I always told him he would be if he gave the rein to his violent passions. Besides, the darn fool's drunk half the time.

“You have been told, gentlemen, by the learned counsel for the defence, that this crime was committed in a rough country, where deeds of violence are so common that it is possible that this man may have died by another hand, murdered by a totally different person, for totally different causes and reasons, and under circumstances totally unconnected with the circumstances set forth in this case. Gentlemen, it is a rough country—rough as the speech of its children, rough as their food and fare, rough as the storms they face, and nigh as rough as the whiskey they drink. But it is a country, gentlemen, where every man knows his neighbor's face and his neighbor's heart, where the dangers and privations of life draw men closer together than they are drawn in great cities like this beautiful town of yours, which is honored by the citizens I see sot before me in this jury box. In that great snow-clad wilderness, on that bitter eighth of December, with the thermometer thirty degrees below zero, I can assure you, gentlemen, that there was no casual, accidental, extemporaneous murderer lilly-twiddling around that chilly solitude,

sauntering among twenty-foot snow-drifts for the purpose of striking down a total stranger with nineteen distinct and separate cuts, and then fading away into nothingness like the airy fabric of a vision. And Jim doing nothing all that time? Gentlemen, the contention of the counsel ain't *sense!*

"Gentlemen, I wish I could tell you that it was so. I wish I could tell you so for Jim's sake. I wish I could tell you so for your own sakes, for on you is soon to rest the awful yet proud responsibility of deciding that a fellow human being's life is forfeit to his blood-guiltiness. I wish I could tell you so for my own sake, regarding myself as a friend of Jim's. But it is the District Attorney, the Prosecutor for the People, that you must listen to while he tells you the story of what happened that night.

"It was half-past eleven of that night when this man Adsum arose. How do I know? Look in the almanac and see where the moon stood at half-past eleven! It was then that he slipped from between his two guards and drew back to where the flickering camp-fire cast the shadow of a pine tree on the wall of snow that shut in their little resting-place. There he stood in that shadow—a shadow that laid on his soul and on his face—and waited to see if one of his comrades stirred. At his feet lay the two men that had been set to guard him, Jared Duncan and Bill Atwood. Eb Spence laid over the way with his feet to the fire. By him laid Sol Geary and

Kentucky Wilson. Why, Jim, I can see it all just as if I was there! And then you—he—then, Gentlemen of the Jury, this prisoner at the bar, slipped from that camp where his companions lay, bound to him as he was bound to them, in the faith of comradeship; and, as he left that little circle, that spot trodden out of the virgin snow, he left behind him his fidelity, his self-respect and his manhood; his mind and soul and heart full of the black and devilish thought of taking by treacherous surprise the life of a comrade. Up to that hour, his spirit had harbored no such evil thought. The men he had theretofore killed—and I am not saying, gentlemen, that he had not killed enough—had been killed in fair and open fight, and there is not a one of them all but will be glad and proud to meet him as gentleman to gentleman at the Judgment Day. But now it was with *murder* in his heart—base, cowardly, faithless murder—that he left that camp; it was with murder in his heart that he sneaked, crouching low, down where the heavy shadows hid the margin of the ice-bound stream. It was with murder in his heart that he laid himself flat upon his belly on the ice when he came within two rods of the Beaver Dam, and worked along, keeping ever in the shadow till he came down to where that Frenchman, who, six hours before, had set out of the same path with him, stood with his light by his side, gazing down into the black hole in the ice that was to be the mouth of his grave

and the portal of his entrance into eternity. Murder, gentlemen, murder nerved his arm when he struck out that light with the fur cap you see now in his hand; and murder's self filled him with a maniac's rage as he rose to his feet and shot and stabbed the defenceless back of his unsuspecting comrade. This, gentlemen, this—and no tale of a prowling stranger—this, gentlemen, is the *truth*; and I will appeal to the prisoner, himself, gentlemen, to bear me out. Jim Adsum, you can lie to this Judge and you can lie to this Jury; you can lie to your neighbors and you can lie to your own conscience; but you can't lie to old man Cutwater, and you know it. Now, Jim, was not that just about the way you done it?"

And Jim nodded his head, turned the fur cap over in his hands, and assented quietly:

"Just about."

Twenty-five minutes later the Jury went out, and Judge Cutwater stalked slowly and thoughtfully over to the prisoner, and touched him on the shoulder.

"Jim," he said, meditatively, "if I know anything about juries, and I think I do, I've hanged you on that talk as sure as guns. Your man's summing-up didn't amount to pea-soup. I'm sorry, of course; but there wasn't no way out of it for either you or me. However, I'll tell you what I'll do. My term as District Attorney expires to-morrow at twelve; and, if you'll send that fool counsel of yours round to me at the

tavern, I'll show him how to drive a horse and cart through the law in this case and get you a new trial, like rolling off a log."

And as Mr. Adsum got not only one but three new trials during the time that I kept track of him, I have every reason to believe that Judge Cutwater of Seneca kept his promise as a man, as faithfully as he performed his duty as a prosecutor for the people.

MR. WICK'S AUNT

THE Wick family had run the usual course of families for many, many years, and was quite old and respectable when causes, natural and extraordinary, none of them being pertinent to this statement, reduced said family to three members, viz.:

MISS ANGELICA SUDBURY WICK, of the Boston branch of the family, who lived in the house of her guardian, old Jonas Thatcher, with whom we have no further concern, and who is therefore to be considered as turned down, although in his day he was a highly respected leather merchant. MISS ANGELICA WICK was fair and sweet and good up to the last requirement of young womanhood.

MR. WINKELMAN HEMPSTEAD WICK, of the Long Island branch of the family, a distant cousin of the young lady, and a young man of conscientious mind, an accountant by profession, and very nearly ready to buy out his employer.

MR. AARON BUSHWICK WICK, also of the Long Island branch of the family, the grand-uncle of young Winkelman, who had brought up the young man in his own house, and who loved him more than anything else in the world, until, in the sixty-ninth year of his age, he fell in love with, and married a lady named Louisa Nasmyth

Pine, whom we will dismiss from consideration as we dismissed the old leather merchant, although she was a most estimable and attractive lady, and did fancy embroidery extremely well. Her only concern with this story is that she bore the elder Mr. Wick a baby, and died three or four months subsequently. But that was enough; plenty; as much as was necessary.

The way that marriage came about was this: old Mr. Wick wanted to see the Wick family perpetuated, but young Mr. Wick was one of those cautious, careful, particular men who get to be old bachelors before they know it. No girl whom he knew was quite exactly what he wanted. If she had been, she would have been too good for any man on earth. In fact, it took young Mr. Wick a number of years to realize that any way he could marry, he could only marry a human being like himself. In the meanwhile his grand-uncle grew impatient; and finally he said that if Winkelman didn't fix on a girl and get her to agree to marry him by the first of next January, he, Aaron Bushwick Wick, would marry somebody himself. Miss Louisa Nasmyth Pine, being then close on to forty, helped him to get under the line just in time to save his grand-nephew from engaging himself to an ill-tempered widow with five children—which is the kind of woman that those particular men generally pick up in the end. And it serves them right.

And so this marriage brought into existence the baby—BEATRICE BRIGHTON WICK.

Old Mr. Wick's endeavors to hand the name of Wick down to posterity were crowned, as you see, with only partial success. He had a Wick, it was true, but it was a Wick that would be put out by marriage. He found himself obliged to fall back on young Winkelman, and he bethought himself of the distant cousin in Boston. He knew nothing of her, but he reasoned that if she were a Wick, she must be everything that was lovely and desirable; and so he said to his grand-nephew:

"Wink, you know that I am a man of my word. If you will go and marry that girl, and if the two of you will take care of that confounded baby, who is crying again, while I put in three or four years in Europe till it gets to some sort of a rational age, I will buy your employer out, guarantee you what is necessary for you to live on in some healthy country place—no city air for that child, do you understand!—and when I die you'll be her guardian and have the usufruct of her estate and be residuary legatee and all that sort of thing."

Winkelman Wick knew that his grand-uncle was a man of his word, and that "all that sort of thing" meant a very, very comfortable sort of thing, for the old gentleman was rich and had liberal ideas, and drank more port than was good for him. He had no fancy for marrying a strange girl, but he thought there could be no harm in going out to Boston and taking a look at his, so far, distant cousin. Under pretense of wanting

to write up the Wick genealogy, he went to Boston, and passed some time under Mr. Thatcher's hospitable roof. He found Angelica Wick all that his fancy might have painted her but hadn't; and, as Mr. Thatcher had six daughters of his own, all of them older than Angelica, and none so good-looking, he did not find any difficulty in inducing his pretty cousin to marry him—and she did not back out even when he sprung the baby contract on her. She said that she was a true woman and that she would stand by him, but that she thought it might be a little awkward. Feminine intuition is a wonderful thing. When it is right, it is apt to be right.

The elder Mr. Wick was as good as his word,—only, as is often the case with people who pride themselves upon being as good as their word, he took his own word too seriously. He died of apoplexy shortly after landing at Liverpool. His will, however, was probated in New York, and thus escaped a legacy tax. The will fully carried out every promise he had made to his young kinsman, but he had drawn it to follow absolutely the terms of his proposition. He had never for an instant contemplated the possibility of his dying before he wanted to—people who make their wills very rarely do—and he had so drawn the document that Mr. and Mrs. Winkelman Wick could come into their inheritance only after carrying out their part of the contract, which was to take care of their aunt, baby Beatrice Brighton Wick, for the space of four

years, during which Mr. Aaron Bushwick Wick had intended, without consideration of the designs of Divine Providence, to sojourn in Europe.

This brings the situation exactly down to bed-rock. On the tenth of April, eighteen hundred and tumty-tum, Mr. Winkelman Wick and Miss Angelica Wick were married in the old Wick house on Montague Street, Brooklyn. On the twenty-fifth of April Mr. Aaron Bushwick Wick ended his journey across the Atlantic at the Port of Liverpool, England. On the twenty-seventh of April he started on that other journey for which your heirs pay your passage money—and he certainly was not happy in his starting place. On the twenty-eighth of the same month young Mr. and Mrs. Wick knew the terms of their grand-uncle's will; and on the thirtieth the old Wick mansion was in the hands of the trustees, and the young Wicks were in a hotel in charge of their baby-aunt, Beatrice, who was herself in charge of an aged Irishwoman, whose feet were decidedly more intelligent than her brain. That is one of the beauties of Ireland. You can get every variety of human being there from a cherub to a chimpanzee.

They were very comfortable in the hotel, and would have liked to stay there, but that awful contract had as many ways of making itself disagreeable as an octopus has. They had pledged themselves, with and for the benefit of the baby, to provide a suitable place in the country without unreasonable delay. Their lawyer informed them

that reasonable delay meant three weeks and not one day more. As their contract began on the tenth of April, they had, therefore, one day left to them to carry out this provision. Moreover, the contract, after defining the phrase, "a suitable country place" in terms that would have fitted a selling advertisement of the Garden of Eden, went on to specify that no place should be considered suitable that was not at least forty miles from any city of twenty thousand inhabitants, or upward. When Mr. Aaron Bushwick Wick wanted pure country air for a baby, he wanted it *pure*. If he could, he would probably have had it brought in sealed bottles.

Picking a place of residence for four long years is not an agreeable task under conditions such as these, especially to a young couple prematurely saddled with parental cares, and equipped with only twenty days of experience in the matrimonial state. They discussed the situation for hours on end. Mrs. Wick wept, and Mr. Wick contributed more profanity than is generally used by a green husband. They even asked the Irish nurse if she could not suggest some suitable place, and they stated the whole situation to her very clearly and carefully. She thought a while, and then suggested Ballymahon, County Longford, Ireland. However, indirectly, she assisted them to solve the problem. Mr. Wick told her to go to Jericho; and Mrs. Wick suddenly brightened up and said:

"Why, that's so, Winkelman!"

Mr. Wick stared in horror at his wife. Was the sweet young thing going crazy under the strain? But no; Mrs. Wick was looking as bright as a rose after an April shower, and she grew brighter and brighter as she stood thinking in silence, nodding her pretty head affirmatively, pursing her lips, and checking off the various stages of her thought with her finger tip on her cheek. Finally she said:

“And you could use the little room for a dressing room. Yes, dear, I’m quite certain it will do beautifully.”

After a while Mr. Wick convinced his wife that he was not a mind-reader, and then he got some information. Of course she did not stay convinced—no woman ever did. All women think that the mechanism of their thought is visible like a model in a glass case.

Mrs. Wick had forgotten that she herself owned a country house. This was more excusable than it seems on the face of it, for she had never seen the house, nor had she ever expected to see it. In fact, it was hardly to be called a house; it was only a sort of bungalow or pavilion which had once belonged to a club of sportsmen, and which her father had taken for a bad debt. It was situated in the village of Jericho, of which she knew nothing more than that her father had said that it was a good place for trout, and was accessible by several different railroads. Concerning the house itself she was better informed. She had had to copy the plans of its interior on

many occasions when her guardian had made futile efforts to sell or to rent it. She also knew that the place was fully furnished, and that an old woman lived in it as care-taker, rent free, and liable to be dispossessed at any moment.

The nurse was told that they would go to Jericho with her. She only asked would the baby take her bottle now or wait till she got there?

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Jericho Junction is one of those lonely and forsaken little stopping-places on the outskirts of the great woods that are the sportsman's paradise, with a dreary, brown-painted, pine box, just big enough for the ticket agent, the baggage master, the telegraph operator, the flagman, the local postmaster, and the casual or possible intending passenger. As this makes two persons in all, the structure is not large.

The casual passenger and the full corps of local railway officials were both present at Jericho Junction when the 6.30 P.M. train loomed out of the dreary, raw May twilight, and drew up in front of the little box. Now, these two occupants of the tiny station were neighbors but not friends. Farmer Byam Beebe lived "a piece back in the country, over t'wards Ellenville South Farms." Mr. John D. Wilkins, station agent, telegraph operator, and all the rest of the functionaries of Jericho Junction, dwelt in his little box, midway between Ellenville South Farms

and the nearest important town, Bunker's Mills, a considerable manufacturing settlement. A houseless stretch of ten miles separated the neighbors; but not even ten miles had stood between them and a grudge of many years' duration. Beebe hated Wilkins, and Wilkins hated Beebe. Never mind why. They were close neighbors for that region; and that more close neighbors do not kill each other testifies every day to the broad spread of Christian charity.

Mr. Beebe so hated Mr. Wilkins that he made it a regular practice to stop at the station after his day's work was done, to wait for this particular train. Silent and unfriendly, he would loaf in the station for an hour and a half, and the station master dared not put him out, for he was possibly an intending passenger on the train as far as the next flag-station, which was a railroad crossing a mile and a quarter further on. Mr. Beebe never bought a ticket from Mr. Wilkins, on the occasions when he did ride. He paid his way on the cars, five cents, plus ten cents rebate-check, and this rebate-check he redeemed at Mr. Wilkins's office the next day. Furthermore, he made a point of going out just before the train arrived, and waiting on the other side of it to get in, so that Mr. Wilkins could not tell whether he boarded the train or walked off through the thick woods that crowded down to the very edge of the line.

Thus it happened that as the train arrived on the evening of the first of May, Mr. Beebe, be-

ing on the farther side of the track from the railroad station, saw an Irish nurse blunder helplessly off the platform in front of him, holding a six months' old baby in her arms, and stand staring straight before her in evident bewilderment. Mr. Beebe accosted her in all kindness:

"Your folks got off the other side, I guess. This here ain't the right side for nobody, only me." Then he prodded the baby with a large and horny finger. "How old will that young 'un be?" he inquired.

"Six months, sorr," replied the nurse; "gahn on seven."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Beebe, with polite affectation of interest. "Folks been long married?"

"Wan month, sorr," replied the nurse.

"*Which?*" inquired Mr. Beebe.

"Wan month, sorr," replied the nurse.

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On the other side of the train of cars, station agent John D. Wilkins saw an old-fashioned carryall drive up, conducted by an elderly woman of austere demeanor. She was dressed in black alpaca, and her look was stern and severe, and, necessarily, highly respectable. He saw a young man and a young woman descend from the train, and saw the young man hand the young woman into the carryall behind the elderly lady. Then, as the young man turned as though to look for some one following him, he heard the young woman say:

“Winkelman, dear, I don’t care *what* her age is, you *must* spank your aunt!”

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When Mr. John D. Wilkins heard what he heard, he forgot the rules of the railroad company, according to which he should have remained on the platform until the train had left. He knew that just at 6.30 his particular crony, Mr. Hiram Stalls, telegraph operator at Bunker’s Mills, and news-gatherer for the Bunker’s Mills *Daily Eagle*, went off duty in his telegraphic capacity, and became an unalloyed journalist. He caught Mr. Stalls in the act of saying good-night, and he talked to him over the wire in dot and dash thus:

“That you, Hi? Meet me at the station when the 7.21 gets in. I’ve got a news item for you that will make the *Eagle* scream this trip, sure.”

If Mr. Wilkins had not been so zealous in breaking his employer’s rules in the interest of personal journalism, he would have heard the young man thus enjoined to inflict humiliating punishment upon a parent’s sister, respond to this cruel counsel in these words:

“It will only make her cry more;—why, where the deuce is the brat, anyway?”

Moreover, he would have seen Mr. Beebe pilot an Irish nurse and a bundled-up baby around the rear of the train, and then jump on the platform as the cars started, with all the vigor and energy which the possession of a real mean story about a fellow human being can impart to the most

aged and stiffened limbs. But he didn't. What would become of the gossip business if those engaged in it stopped to find things out?

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When Cæsar expressed a preference for being the first man in a village, over a second-fiddle job in Rome, he probably never reflected how much it would rile him if he should happen to find out that there was just as big a man in the next village who didn't know Cæsar from a cheese-cake; yet that is the poor limitation of local bigness. Great is Mr. Way in Wayback, and great is Mr. Hay in Hayville; but what is Mr. Way in Hayville, and what is Mr. Hay in Wayback? Two nothings, two casual strangers, with no credit, with no say-no, two mere chunks of humanity whose value to the community is strictly proportionate to the size of their green-back wads, and the laxity or tenacity of their several grips thereon.

At nine o'clock that night two local Cæsars, in two towns but a score of miles from each other, donned the ermine of power, waved the sceptre of authority, and told their pale-faced but devoted followers that "SOMETHING had got to be done about IT."

The "IT," of course, was an "OUTRAGE"—it always is when something has got to be done about it, and the something generally means just about nothing.

In the front parlor of his large mansard-roof

residence, Mr. Bodger—Mr. Theophilus Scranton Bodger, prominent manufacturer, pillar of the Church, candidate for the mayoralty, and general all around magnate and muldoon of Bunker's Mills, sat amid surroundings of much elegance, black walnut, gilt, plush and hand-painted tidies, and slapping a broad palm with a burly fist, told Mr. Stalls, Mr. Wilkins and Mrs. Bodger that something had got to be done about it.

At the same moment, in the Sunday School room of the Baptist Church in Ellenville South Farms, Mr. Manfred Lusk Hackfeather, theological student, Sunday School superintendent, social leader and idol of the ladies in Ellenville South Farms, told six fluttering feminine things, who gazed at him in affectionate awe, that something had got to be done about it.

Mr. Bodger's business was making socks. Mr. Hackfeather may have been wearing a pair of socks of Mr. Bodger's make at that very instant, yet had he never heard of Bodger; nor did Mr. Bodger know that any part of his growing business was built up on the money of a man named Hackfeather.

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To say that a party of Brooklyn people, conducted in an old-fashioned carryall, by an elderly woman of austere demeanor, entered the deep pine wood in a chilled twilight of early Spring certainly ought to convey an impression of gloom. And certainly gloom of the deepest enshrouded

the beginning of that ride. Diligent inquiry elicited from the elderly woman that she was, as the Wicks supposed, Miss Hipsy, the caretaker; that she had received their telegram, or she wouldn't have been there nohow; that she had had a contrack with the late owner of the premises; that she had lived up to it, whatever other people hed or hedn't done; that what she had done she would do, and that if she was not satisfactory to other parties, or if other parties was not satisfactory to her, which was most likely to be the case, she was willin', as far as she was concerned, to take herself off just as soon as she could; that she thanked Providence she had folks in Ellenville she could go to, as respectable as some, that she could go to and no obligations to nobody, and that she was not aware that her contrack called for no general conversation.

Now this extremely discouraging way and manner of Miss Hipsy's was entirely general and impersonal, like dampness or a close smell in a long unused house. Congenitally sub-acid, a failure to accomplish any sort of an early or late love affair had completely soured her, and many years of solitude had put a gray-green coating of mildew over her moral nature. But the Wicks did not know this, and, remembering their peculiar position, it made them feel extremely uncomfortable.

But the moon came out in the soft Spring sky, and the mists of the evening rolled away, and a great silvery radiance wrapped the ca-

thedral-like spires and pinnacles of the broad spreading pine forest, and, after awhile, the rough corduroy road grew smoother, and the baby stopped crying and went to sleep, and they were all, except Miss Hipsy, beginning to nod off just a little when the wheels crunched on a driveway of white pebbles, and they looked up to see a spacious low building standing out black against the sky, except where a half a dozen brightly lit windows winked at them like friendly eyes.

This was the bungalow, and here they found a sportsman's supper of cold meat and ale awaiting them. Miss Hipsy told them, by way of leaving no doubt of the unfriendliness of her intentions, that this refecton was provided for in the contract. So, also, must have been the deliciously soft beds in which they were presently all fast asleep, even to the baby. And when a traveling baby will sleep, anybody else can.

In the morning the elder Wicks opened their eyes on a world of wonderment and bewilderment. They found themselves living in a well-appointed and commodious club-house, on the banks of a broad and beautiful lake, across which other similar structures with pretty, low, peaked roofs looked at them in neighborly fashion from the other side. Mrs. Wick said that it was too nice for anything.

There was nothing mysterious about the surprise which the Wicks had found awaiting them. Sportsmen have a habit of referring to their

possessions in a depreciatory way. They call a comfortable club-house a "box" or a "bungalow" or a "shack," and they make nothing of calling a costly hotel a "camp." Indeed, they seem to try to impart a factitious flavor of profanity by christening such structures, whenever they can, "Middle Dam Camp" or "Upper Dam Camp." And since Mrs. Wick's father's club had died out, the further side of Jericho Pond had become a fashionable resort, maintaining two or three Winter and Summer Sanitariums.

Thanks to the contract, they made an excellent breakfast, and their praises of the fare mollified Miss Hipsy to some slight extent. Then they remembered the baby, and after some search they found the Irish nurse walking it up and down on a broad sunny terrace at the back of the house. Below stretched an old-fashioned garden, full of homely, pleasant flowers and simples just beginning to show their buds to the tempting month of May.

The scene was so pleasant that Mr. and Mrs. Wick started out for a walk, and the walk was so pleasant that they prolonged it,—prolonged it until they reached the settlement on the other side of the lake, and the people there were so pleasant that they stayed to dinner at a club, and did not get back till nearly supper-time.

You will please observe that, so far as the members of the Wick family are concerned, they stand as clear at this point as they did when we got them down to bed-rock level, on the tenth of

April, eighteen hundred and tumty-tum. Their ways have been ways of pleasantness, and their paths have been paths of peace. The two Wicks we are dealing with, like all the other Wicks, have kept their engagements and filled their contract. They have minded their own business and nobody else's. They are, in fact, all straight on the record.

But now we have to recount the fortunes of two social reformers, and it is hard for a reformer to keep straight on the record. Whether they have a genuine reform on their hands, like Martin Luther or the Abolitionists, or whether they are like Mr. Harold Kettledrum Monocle, of New York, who thinks that the Mayor of that city ought to be elected by Harvard College, they are all likely to have what one might call a mote-and-beam sort of time with their neighbors.

Thus did it happen with Mr. Bodger, of Bunker's Mills, and with Mr. Hackfeather, of Ellenville South Farms, who both found their way to Jericho Pond that pleasant afternoon, the theological student a little in advance of the business man. Mr. Hackfeather came to rebuke a shocking case of impropriety in two so young; Mr. Bodger came to express the sentiment of society at large toward a man who would inflict corporal chastisement on a lady.

Terrible as with an army with banners, and consumed with the fire of righteousness, Mr. Hackfeather bore down on the old-fashioned garden at the back of the bungalow, in the full

glory of the Spring afternoon. As to his person, he was attired in a long, black diagonal frock-coat, worn unbuttoned, and so well worn that its flaps waved in the wind with all the easy grace of a linen duster. Trousers of the kind that chorus together: "We are pants," adorned his long, thin but heavily-kneed legs. A shoe-string necktie, a low cut waistcoat, and a whole-souled, oh-be-joyful shirtfront added to this simple but harmonious effect, and his last year's hat had a mellow tone against the pale Spring-time greens. He tackled Miss Hipsy (who had so far relented from her austerity as to take the baby while the nurse got dinner,) in that old-fashioned garden; and the benign influences of budding nature had no effect whatever upon his pious wrath. He pointed out the discrepancy in the dates of the vital statistics of the Wick family, and he told Miss Hipsy that she was the servant of sin, (who had been a respectable woman for forty-three years, and if some as ought to know better said it was forty-seven there was no truth in it,) that she was the slave of iniquity and abettor of sin, (and if them she knowed of, one leastways, was alive to-day she would not be insulted,) that the demon vice should not rear its hideous head in that unpoluted community, (and she wasn't rarin' no heads, but she could go to them she knowed of as could rare their heads as high as him or any of his friends,) and that even if he, Mr. Hack-feather, had to face all the minions of Satan,

and all the retinue of the Scarlet Woman, he would purify the stain or die in the attempt. Mr. Hackfeather's allusion to the Lady of Babylon probably was born of a mixed condition of mind, and a desire to use forcible language. It did not seem clear to him and it did not seem clear to Miss Hipsy, either. She said she was no such a thing, and never expected to live to see the day she would be so called, especially at her time of life. And, tearful and vociferous, Miss Hipsy marched back to the bungalow, delivered over the baby to the Irish nurse, packed her little old hair trunk with the round top, dragged it down herself to the lake-front dock, and there sat on it in stern grandeur until the afternoon boat came down the lake and took her to Ellenville, presumably to the sheltering arms of them that she knowed of.

Meanwhile, a thing she did not know of was happening on the other side of the house in that same old-fashioned garden. Mr. Bodger, accompanied by Mr. Stalls and Mr. Wilkins, had arrived from Bunker's Mills to interview the new arrival in the county, whose latitude in administering corporal punishment had aroused the indignation of every humane heart that had been made acquainted with the station master's story. Mr. Bodger saw the departure of the weeping woman of elderly aspect, he heard her wails, and he saw their cause in a strange young man. This was all the evidence that he wanted. Mr. Bodger made no inquiries into identity or re-

lationship. He weighed two hundred and twenty pounds, he had three men behind him, and he fell upon Mr. Hackfeather as the cyclone falls upon the chicken-coop.

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The consequences of these two meetings were so far-reaching, extending to warrants of arrest, counter charges, civil suits and much civiler compromises, that it was July before the ladies of the Bodger and Hackfeather families picked up their threads of social intercourse, which were knotted only at one point. To both of them it occurred on a fine Summer's day to call on the new comers at the old bungalow by way of seeing whether the innocent causes of so much dire mischief knew anything about the agitation they had caused.

As the train from Bunker's Mills met the boat from Ellenville, Mr. Bodger's wife and Mr. Hackfeather's mother arrived at the same time, and, sitting in the sunny reception room of the bungalow, glared at each other in chilly and silent hostility, while poor, innocent little Mrs. Wick, much troubled by their strange behavior, tried to talk to both of them at once, and rattled away in her embarrassment until she had talked a great deal more than she had meant to. She told them all the story of Beatrice Brighton Wick, and the will, and the hurried flight to Jericho, and at their surprise at finding Jericho Pond with its Summer and Winter colony so

delightful a place that they hardly felt as if they could tear themselves away from it when the four years were up. And she told them that both she and Mr. Wick had thought it might be quite awkward for so newly married a couple to be traveling with a six month's old baby, and that baby Mr. Wick's aunt.

"But, do you know," she said, "we must have been over-sensitive about it, for we never had the first least little bit of trouble. Indeed, the only mishap we had was the other way. The old woman who was in charge of the place here left us suddenly the first day without a word of warning. I couldn't make out why she was dissatisfied, but my nurse, Nora, told me that she thought that Miss Hipsy thought that the baby was too young. Some people have such an objection to young babies, you know. However, it didn't the least bit matter, for Nora turned out to be a very good cook, and I took the baby. I wanted to learn, you know."

WHAT MRS. FORTESCUE DID

RIGHT in the rear of the First Congregational Church of 'Quawket, and cornerwise across the street, the Old Ladies' Home of Aquawket sits on the topmost of a series of velvety green terraces. It is a quiet street; the noisiest thing in it, or rather over it, is the bell in the church steeple, and that is as deep toned and mellow as all church bells ought to be and few church bells are. As to the Old Ladies' Home, itself, it looks like the veritable abode of peace. A great wistaria clammers over its dull brown stucco walls. Beds of old-fashioned flowers nod and sway in the chastened breezes on its two sunny sides, and thick clumps of lilacs and syringas shield it to the north and east. Dainty little dimity curtains flutter at the open windows all Summer long; and, whether it comes from the immaculately neat chambers of the old ladies, or from some of the old-fashioned flower beds, there is always, in warm weather, a faint smell of lavender floating down upon the breeze to the passer-by in the quiet street. You would never dream, to look at it, that the mad, inhuman, pitiless strife and fury of an Old Ladies' Home raged ceaselessly, year after year, within those quiet walls.

Now suppose that every wasp in a certain wasp's nest had an individual theology of its own, totally different from the theology of any other wasp, and that each one personally conducted his theology in the real earnest calvinistic spirit—you would call that wasp's nest a pretty warm, lively, interesting domicile, would you not? Well, it would be a paradise of paralysis alongside of an Old Ladies' Home. If you want to get at the original compound tincture of envy, malice and all uncharitableness, go to a nice, respectable Old Ladies' Home with a list of "Lady Patronesses" as long as your arm, and get the genuine article in its most highly concentrated form.

There were eleven inmates of the Old Ladies' Home of Aquawket, besides the matron, the nurse, the cook, and a couple of "chore-girls." These two last led a sort of life that came very near to qualifying them for admission to the institution on a basis of premature old age. Of the real old ladies in the home, every one of the eleven had a bitter and undying grievance against at least one, and, possibly, against ten of her companions, and the only thing that held the ten oldest of the band together was the burning scorn and hatred which they all felt for the youngest of the flock, Mrs. Williametta Fortescue, who signed what few letters she wrote "Willie," and had been known to the world as "Billy" Fortescue when she sang in comic opera and wore pink tights.

All the other old ladies said that Mrs. For-

tescue was a daughter of Belial, a play actress, and no old lady, anyway. I know nothing about her ancestry—and I don't believe that she did, either; but as to the other two counts in the indictment I am afraid I must plead guilty for Mrs. Fortescue. An actress she was, to the tips of her fingers, an unconscious, involuntary, dyed-in-the-wool actress. She acted because she could not help it, not from any wish to deceive or mislead, but just because it came as natural to her as breathing. If you asked her to take a piece of pie, it was not enough for her to want the pie, and to tell you so, and to take the pie; she had to act out the whole dramatic business of the situation—her passion for pie, her eager craving and anxious expectation, her incredulous delight when she actually got the pie, and her tender, brooding thankfulness and gratitude when she had got outside of the pie, and put it where it couldn't be taken away from her. No; there wasn't the least bit of humbug in it all. She did want the pie; but she wanted to act, too.

It was this characteristic of Mrs. Fortescue that got her into the Old Ladies' Home on false pretenses; for, to tell the truth, Mrs. Fortescue was only an old lady by courtesy. She had beautiful white hair; but she had had beautiful white hair ever since she was twenty years old. Before she had reached that age she had had red hair, black hair, brown hair, golden hair, and hair of half-a-dozen intermediate shades. Either the hair or the hair dye finally got tired, and Mrs.

Fortescue's head became white—that is, when she gave it a chance to be its natural self. That, however, was not often; and, at last, there came a day when, as her manager coarsely expressed it, “she monkeyed with her fur one time too many.” For ten years she had been the leading lady in a small traveling opera company, where tireless industry and a willingness to wait for salary were accepted as substitutes for extreme youth and commanding talent. Ten years is a long time, especially when it is neither the first nor the second, and, possibly, not the third ten years of an actress's professional career; and when Mrs. Fortescue asked for a contract for three years more, her manager told her that he was not in the business for his health, and that while he regarded her as one of the most elegant ladies he had ever met in his life, her face was not made of India rubber; and, furthermore, that the public was just about ready for the Spring styles in leading ladies. This did not hurt Mrs. Fortescue's feelings, for the leading juvenile had long been in the habit of calling her “Mommer, dear,” whenever they had to rehearse impassioned love scenes. But it did put her on her mettle, and she tried a new hair dye, just to show what she could do. The result was a case of lead poisoning, that laid her up in a dirty little second-class hotel, in a back street of 'Quawket for three months of suffering and helplessness. The company went its way and left her, and went to pieces in the end. The greater

part of her poor savings went for the expenses of her sickness. At last, when the critical period was over, her doctor got some charitably-disposed ladies and gentlemen interested in her case; and, between them all, they procured admission to the Old Ladies' Home for a poor, white-haired, half-palsied wreck of a woman, who not only was decrepit before her time, but who acted decrepitude so successfully that nobody thought of asking her if she were less than eighty years old. I do not mean to say that Mrs. Fortescue willfully deceived her benefactors: she was old—oldish, anyway—she was helpless, partially paralyzed, and her system was permeated with lead; but when she came to add to this the correct dramatic outfit of expression, she was so old, and so sick, and so utterly miserable and stricken and done for that the hearts of the managers of the Old Ladies' Home were opened, and they took her in at half the usual entrance fee; because, as the matron very thoughtfully remarked, she couldn't possibly live six weeks, and it was just so much clear gain for the institution. By the end of six weeks, however, Mrs. Fortescue was just as well as she had ever been in her life, and was acting about twice as healthy as she felt.

With her trim figure, her elastic step, and her beautiful white hair setting off her rosy cheeks—and Mrs. Fortescue knew how to have rosy cheeks whenever she wanted them—she certainly was an incongruous figure in an Old Ladies'

Home, and it was no wonder that her presence made the genuine old ladies genuinely mad. And every day of her stay they got madder and madder; for by the constitution of the Home, an inmate might, if dissatisfied with her surroundings, after a two-years' stay, withdraw from the institution, *taking her entrance fee with her*. And that was why Mrs. Fortescue stayed on in the Old Ladies' Home, snubbed, sneered at, totally indifferent to it all, eating three square meals a day, and checking off the dull but health-giving weeks that brought her nearer to freedom, and the comfortable little nest-egg with which she meant to begin life again.

And yet the time came when Mrs. Fortescue's histrionic capacity won for her, if not a friend, at least an ally, out of the snarling sisterhood; and for a few brief months there was just one old woman out of the lot who was decently civil to her, and who even showed rudimentary systems of polite intentions.

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This old woman was Mrs. Filley, and this was the manner of her modification.

One pleasant Spring day, a portly gentleman of powerful frame, with ruddy cheeks and short, steel-gray hair—a man whose sturdy physique hardly suited with his absent-minded, unbusiness-like expression of countenance—ascended the terraces in front of the Old Ladies' Home. His brows were knit; he looked upon the ground as he walked, and he did not in the least notice the

eleven old ladies, the matron, the nurse, the cook and the two "chore-girls" who were watching his every step with profound interest.

Mrs. Fortescue was watching the gentleman with interest, because she thought that he was a singularly fine-looking and well-preserved man, as indeed he was. All the other inmates of the Home were watching him with interest because he was Mr. Josiah Heatherington Filley, the millionaire architect, civil engineer and contractor. Their interest, however, was not excited by Mr. Filley's fame as a designer of mighty bridges, of sky-scraping office buildings, and of other triumphs of mechanical skill; they looked on him with awe and rapture simply because he was the richest man in 'Quawket, or, more properly speaking, in 'Quawket Township; for Mr. Filley lived in the old manor-house of the Filley family, a couple of miles out of town.

You might think that with a millionaire Mr. Filley coming up the steps, the heart of indigent Mrs. Filley in the Old Ladies' Home might beat high with expectation; but, as a matter of fact, it did not. In Connecticut and New Jersey family names mean no more than the name of breeds of poultry—like Plymouth Rocks or Wyandottes. All Palmers are kin, so are all Vreelands, and the Smiths of Peapack are of one stock. But so are all speckled hens, and kinship may mean no more in one case than it does in the other. In colonial times, Filleys had abounded in 'Quawket. But to Mrs. Filley of the Home the visit of Mr. Filley

of the Manor House was as the visit of a stranger; and very much surprised, indeed, was she when the great man asked to see her.

In spite of his absent-minded expression, Mr. Filley proved to be both direct and business-like. He explained his errand briefly and clearly.

Mr. Filley was a bachelor, and the last of his branch of the family. His only surviving relative was a half-brother by his mother's first marriage, who had lived a wandering and worthless life, and who had died in the West a widower, leaving one child, a girl of nine, in a Massachusetts boarding-school. This child he had bequeathed to the loving care and attention of his brother. It is perfectly wonderful how men of that particular sort, who never can get ten dollars ahead of the world, will pick up a tremendous responsibility of that kind, and throw it around just as if it were a half-pound dumb-bell. They don't seem to mind it at all; it does not weigh upon their spirits; they will pass over a growing child to anybody who happens to be handy, to be taken care of for life, just as easily as you would hand a towel over to the next man at the wash-basin, as soon as you are done with it. Mr. Filley's half-brother may have died easily, and probably did, but he could not possibly have made such a simple job of it as he did of turning over Etta Adelina, his daughter, to the care of the half-brother whom he hardly knew well enough to borrow money from oftener than once a year.

Now, Mr. Josiah Filley had promised his mother on her death-bed that he would assume a certain sort of responsibility for the consequences of the perfectly legitimate but highly injudicious matrimonial excursion of her early youth, and so he accepted the guardianship of Etta Adelina. But he was not, as the worldly phrase it, "*too easy*." He was a profound scientific student, and a man whose mind was wrapt up in his profession, but he did not propose to make a parade-ground of himself for everybody who might feel inclined to walk over him. He had no intention of taking the care of a nine-year-old infant upon himself, and the happy idea had come to him of hunting up the last feminine bearer of his name in the 'Quawket Old Ladies' Home, and hiring her for a liberal cash payment to represent him as a quarterly visitor to the school where the young one was confined.

"I don't suppose," he said, "there is any actual relationship between us—"

"There ain't none," interrupted Mrs. Filley; "leastwise there ain't been none since your father got money enough to send you to college."

Mr. Filley smiled indulgently.

"Well," he suggested, "suppose we re-establish relationship as cousins. All you have to do for some years to come is to visit the Tophill Institute once in three months, satisfy yourself that the child is properly taken care of and educated, and kindly treated, and to make a full and complete report to me in writing. If anything is

wrong, let me know. I shall examine your reports carefully. Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, if I am satisfied that it is correct and faithful, I will send you my check for fifty dollars. Is it a bargain?"

It was a bargain, but poor old Mrs. Filley stipulated for a payment in cash instead of by check. She had once in her life been caught on a worthless note, and she never had got the distinction between notes and checks clear in her mind. As to Mr. Josiah Filley, he was not wholly satisfied with the representative of his family, so far as grammar and manners were concerned; but he saw with his scholar's eye, that looked so absent-minded and took in so much, that the old lady was both shrewd and kindly-natured, and he felt sure that Etta Adelina would be safe in her hands.

When I said that Mrs. Filley was kindly, I meant that as a human being she was capable of kindness. Of course, as an inmate of an Old Ladies' Home, she was just as spiteful as any other of the old ladies, and her first natural impulse was to make a profound mystery of Mr. Filley's errand, not only because by so doing she could tease the other old ladies, but from a natural, old-ladylike fear that somebody else might get her job away from her. But she found herself unable to carry out her pleasant scheme in its entirety. Nine of her aged comrades, and all the members of the household staff, consumed their souls in bitterness, wondering what the mil-

lionaire had wanted of his humble kinswoman; and three times in the course of one year they saw that excellent woman put on her Sunday black silk and take her silent way to the railroad station. On the day following they saw her return, but where she had been or why she had been there they knew not. By the rules of the Home she had a right to eight days of absence annually. She told the matron that she was going to see her "folks." The matron knew well that she had not a folk in the world, but she had to take the old lady's word.

But did not those dear old ladies ask the ticket-agent at the station what station Mrs. Filley took tickets for? Indeed they did, bless them! And the ticket-agent told them that Mrs. Filley had bought a thousand-mile ticket, and that they would have to hunt up the conductors who took up her coupons on the next division of the road, if they wanted to find out. (A thousand-mile ticket, gentle reader, is a delightful device by means of which you can buy a lot of travel in one big chunk, and work it out in little bits whenever you want to. Next to a sure and certain consciousness of salvation, it gives its possessor more of a feeling of pride and independence than anything else this life has to offer.)

And yet Mrs. Filley's happiness was incomplete, for it was necessary to let one person into her secret. She put it on her spectacles, which had not been of the right kind for a number of years, owing to the inferiority of modern glass-

ware, but defective education was what brought Mrs. Filley to making a confidant of Mrs. Fortescue. No spectacles that ever were made would have enabled Mrs. Filley to spell, and when she began her first report thus:

“i sene the gerl She had or to hav cod-
liver roil—”

even she, herself, felt that it was hardly the report for Mr. Filley’s fifty-dollars. Here is the way that Mrs. Fortescue started off that report in her fine Italian hand:

“It gives me the greatest pleasure, my dear Mr. Filley, to inform you that, pursuant to your instructions, I journeyed yesterday to the charming, and I am sure salubrious shades of Tophill, to look after the welfare of your interesting and precocious little ward. Save for the slight pallor which might suggest the addition of some simple tonic stimulant, such as codliver oil, to the generous fare of the Tophill Academy, I found your little Etta Adelina in every respect—”

Mrs. Filley’s name was signed to that report in the same fine Italian hand; and it surprised Mr. Filley very much when he saw it. But there was more surprise ahead for Mr. Filley.

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As a business man Mr. Filley read the paper, but not the local papers of 'Quawket, for it was seldom that the papers were local there long

enough to get anybody into the habit of reading them. Thus it came about that he failed to see the notice of the death of old Mrs. Filley, which occurred in the Old Ladies' Home something less than a twelve-month after the date of his first and only visit. The death occurred, however, but the reports kept on coming in the same fine Italian hand, and with the same generous freedom in language of the most expensive sort. No man could have got more report for fifty dollars than Mr. Filley got, and the report did not begin to be the most of what he was getting.

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Sometimes clergymen but slightly acquainted with the theatrical business are surprised when traveling through small towns to see lithographs and posters displaying the features of great stars of the theatrical and operatic world, who are billed to appear in some local opera house about two sizes larger than a cigar-box. The portraits are familiar, the names under them are not; you may recognize the features of Joe Jefferson and Adelina Patti, with labels on them establishing their identity as "Comical Maginnis, the Monkey Mugger," and "Sadie Sylvester, the Society Clog Artiste." These are what are known as "Stock-printing," and it is pleasant to reflect that the printers who get them up for a fraud on the public rarely are able to collect their bills from the actors and actresses that use them, and that the audiences that go to such shows don't know

the difference between Adelina Patti and an oyster patty.

This explanation of an interesting custom is made to forestall the reader's surprise at learning that two years and a half after her retirement from the stage, and ten years, at least, after the retirement of such of her youthful charms as might have justified the exhibition, the portrait of Mrs. Fortescue, arrayed in silk tights, of a most constricted pattern—not constricted at all, simply constricted—decorated scores of fences in what theatrical people call the “’Quawket Circuit,” which circuit includes the charming and presumably salubrious shades of Tophill. There was no mistaking Mrs. Fortescue's face; Mrs. Fortescue's attire might have given rise to almost any sort of mistake. The name under the picture was not that of Mrs. Fortescue; it was that of a much advertised young person whose “dramatic speciality” was entitled “Too Much for London; or, Oh, My! Did you Ever!”

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Now, it is necessary to disinter old Mrs. Filley for a moment, and to smirch her character a little by way of introducing some excuse for what Mrs. Fortescue did.

By the time Mrs. Fortescue had cooked her third report, she had found out that the old lady had not quite kept faith with her employer. At the Tophill Institute she had represented herself

as Mr. Filley's mother, gaining thereby much consideration and many cups of tea. So that when she died, with the rest of her secret hidden from all but Mrs. Fortescue, the latter lady, having fully made up her mind to appropriate the job, felt that it behooved her to go her predecessor one better, and when she made her appearance at Tophill it was in the character of Mr. Filley's newly married wife. She told the sympathetic all about it, how Mr. Filley and she had known each other from childhood, how he had always loved her, how she had wedded another to please her family, how the other had died, and Mr. Filley had renewed his addresses, how she had staved him off (I am not quoting her language) until his dear old mother had died, and left him so helpless and lonely that she really had to take pity on him. Mrs. Filley No. 2 got all the consideration she wanted, and the principal sent out for champagne for her, under the impression that that was the daily and hourly drink in all millionaire families. He never found out otherwise from Mrs. Filley, either.

Probably Mrs. Fortescue-Filley had calculated on keeping up her pretty career of imposture until her time of probation at the Home was up, and she could withdraw her entrance fee and vanish at once from 'Quawket and Tophill. She had the report business well in hand; her employer occasionally wrote her for detailed information on minor points of the child's work or personal needs, but in general expressed

himself perfectly satisfied; and she felt quite safe, so far as he was concerned, when he commissioned her to put the child through an all-round examination, and sent her fifty dollars extra with his "highest compliments" on her manner of doing it. Indeed, in this she was no humbug. She could have put the principal, himself, through his scholastic facings if she had cared to.

But the appearance of those unholy portraits came without warning, and did their work thoroughly. Even if it had not been that every child in the institute could recognize that well-known countenance, a still more damning disclosure came in the prompt denunciation of the fraud by the "Indignant Theatre Goer" with a long memory, who wrote to the local paper to protest against the profanation, as he put it, of the features of a peerless Mrs. Fortescue, once an ornament of the stage, and now dwelling in retirement in 'Quawket. Ordinary, common, plain, everyday gossip did the rest.

Mrs. Fortescue saw the posters on her way to Tophill, but she dauntlessly presented herself at the portal. She got no further. The principal interposed himself between her and his shades of innocents, and he addressed that creature of false pretenses in scathing language—or it might have scathed if the good man had not been so angry that he talked falsetto.

It did not look as if there were much in the situation for Mrs. Fortescue, but it would be a

strange situation out of which the old lady could not extract just the least little bit of acting. She drew herself up in majestic indignation, hurled the calumnies back at the astonished principal, and with a magnificent threat to bring Mr. Filley right to the spot to utterly overwhelm and confute him, she swept away, leaving the Institute looking two sizes smaller, and its principal looking no particular size at all.

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And, what is more, she did, for her magnificent dramatic outburst made her fairly acting-drunk. She could not help herself; she was inebriated with the exuberance of her own verbosity, to use a once famous phrase, and she simply had to go off on a regular histrionic bat.

She went straight off to the old Filley Manor House at the extreme end of 'Quawket township; she bearded the millionaire builder in his great cool, darkened office, among his mighty plans and elevations and mysterious models, and she told that great man the whole story of her imposture with such a torrent of comic force, with such marvelous mimicry of the plain-spoken Mrs. Filley and the prim principal, and with so humorous an introduction of the champagne episode that her victim lay back in his leather arm-chair, slapped his sturdy leg, roared out mighty peals of laughter, told her she was the most audacious little woman in the whole hemi-

sphere, and that he never heard of anything so funny in his life, and that he'd call down any number of damn school-masters if she wanted him to.

"I don't see how we can arrange a retro-active, Ma'am; I'm a little bit too old for that sort of thing, I'm afraid. But I'll tell you what I can do. I'll send my agent at once to take the child out of school, and I'll see that my man doesn't give him any satisfaction or a chance for explanation.

"Why, damn it!" concluded the hearty Mr. Filley; "if I ever see the little prig I'll tell him I think it is a monstrous and great condescension on your part to let yourself be known as the wife of a plain old fellow like me. Why doesn't a man know a handsome woman when he sees her?"

"Then I am forgiven for all my wickedness?" said Mrs. Fortescue—but, oh! *how* she said it!

"Forgiveness?" repeated Mr. Filley, thoughtfully. "Yes; I think so." Then he rose, crossed the room to a large safe, in which he opened a small drawer. From this he took a small package of papers which he placed in Mrs. Fortescue's hands. She recognized her own reports, and also a curious scrawl on a crumpled and discolored piece of paper, which also she promptly recognized. It was a "screw" that had held three cents' worth of snuff, and she had seen it in Mrs. Filley's hand just about the time that

dear old lady was passing away. She read it now for the first time:

“dere mr Filley i kno that fort escew woman is gone to kepon senden them re ports an nottel you ime dedd but iam Sara Filley.”

“She sent that to me,” said Mr. Filley, “by Doctor Butts, the house physician, and between us we managed to get a ‘line’ on you, Mrs. Fortescue; so that there’s been a little duplicity on both sides.”

Mrs. Fortescue looked at him with admiration mingled with respect; then she looked puzzled.

“But why, if you knew it all along, why did you—”

“Why did I let you go on?” repeated Mr. Filley. “Well, you’ve got to have the whole duplicity, I see.” He went back to the drawer and took out another object. It was a faded photograph of a young lady with her hair done up in a net, and with a hat like a soap-dish standing straight up on her head.

“Twenty-five years ago,” said Mr. Filley, “boy; three dollars a week in an architect’s office; spent two-fifty of them, two weeks running, for flowers for that young lady when she played her first engagement in New Haven. Walked there. Paid the other fifty cents to get into the theatre. Lived on apples the rest of the week. Every boy does it. Never forgets it. Place always remains soft.”

And, as Mrs. Fortescue sat and looked long

and earnestly at the picture, a soft color came into her face that was born rather of memory than of her love for acting; and yet it wonderfully simulated youth and fresh beauty and a young joy in life.

“THE MAN WITH THE PINK PANTS”

THIS is a tale of pitiless and persistent vengeance, and it shows by what simple means a very small and unimportant person may bring about the undoing of the rich, great and influential. It was told to me by my good friend, the Doctor, as we strolled through the pleasant suburbs of a pretty little city that is day by day growing into greatness and ugliness, as what they call a manufacturing centre.

We had been watching the curious antics of a large man who would have attracted attention at any time on account of his size, his luxuriant hair and whiskers, and the strange condition of the costly clothing he wore—a frock-coat and trousers of the extremest fashion, a rolling white waist-coat, gray-spatted patent-leathers, and a silk hat. But all these fine articles of apparel were much soiled in places, his coat-collar was half turned up, the hat had met with various mishaps, his shoes were scratched and dusty, his cravat ill-tied, and altogether his appearance suggested a puzzling combination of prosperity and hard luck. His doings were stranger than his looks. He tacked cautiously from side to side of the way, peered up a cross-street here; went slowly and cautiously up another for a few yards,

only to return and to efface himself for a moment behind a tree or in a doorway.

Suddenly he gave signs of having caught sight of somebody far up a narrow lane. Promptly bolting into the nearest front yard, he got behind the syringa bush and waited patiently until another man, smaller, but much more active, hurried sharply down the lane, glancing suspiciously around. This second person missed seeing the big man, and after waiting irresolutely a moment or two, he hailed a street-car going toward the town. At the same time another car passed him going in the opposite direction. With incredible agility, the large man darted from behind the syringa bush and made the second car in the brief second the little man's back was turned. Swinging himself inside, the figures on the rear platform promptly concealed him from view, and as he was whirled past us we could distinctly hear him emit a tremendous sigh or puff of profound relief.

"You don't know him?" said the Doctor, smiling. "Yes, you do; at least, you have seen him before; and I will show you him in his likeness as you saw him two little years ago.

"Such as you see that man to-day," continued the Doctor, as we strolled toward the town, "he is entirely the creation of one small and insignificant man; not the man you just saw watching for him, but another so very insignificant that his name even is forgotten by the few who have heard it. I alone remember his face. Nobody

knows anything else that throws light on his identity, except the fact that he was on one occasion addressed as ‘Mr. Thingumajig,’ and that he is or was a writer for the press, in no very great way of business. Now let us turn down Main Street, and I will show you the man he reduced to the ignominious object we have just been watching.”

We soon stopped at a photograph gallery, and the Doctor led me, in a way that showed that his errand was not a rare one, to a little room in the rear, where, on a purple velvet background, hung a nearly life-size crayon portrait. It represented a large gentleman—the large gentleman whom we had just seen—attired in much similar garments, only that in the picture his neatness was spotless and perfect. Not a wrinkle, not a stain marred him from top to toe. He stood in the graceful and dignified attitude of one who has been set up by his fellow-citizens to be looked at and admired, and who knows that his fellow-citizens are only doing the right thing by him. His silk hat was jauntily poised upon his hip, and the smile that illuminated his moustache and whiskers was at once genial, encouraging, condescending, and full of deep religious and political feeling. It was hardly necessary to look at the superb gilt inscription below to know that that portrait was “Presented by the Vestry of St. Dives Church, on the Occasion of his Retirement from their Body to Assume the Burden of Civic Duties in the Assembly of the

State that Counts Him Among her Proudest Ornaments."

"Mr. Silo!" cried I.

"Mr. Silo," said the Doctor; "but he did not go to the Assembly, and that picture has never been presented. When you saw him to-day he was running away from his brother-in-law, to get to New York to go on any sort of a spree to drown his misery. Come along, and you shall hear the tale of a fallen idol. And if, as you listen, an ant should cross your path, do not step on it. Mr. Silo stepped upon an ant, and the ant made of him the thing you saw."

I do not tell this story exactly in the Doctor's own words, though I will let it look as if I did. The trouble of letting non-literary people tell stories in their own language is that the "says I's," and the "says he's," and the "well, this man" passages, and "then this other man I was telling you about" interpolations take up so much of the narrative that a story like this could not be read while a pound of candles burned.

But here is about the way the Doctor ought to have told it:

I do not wish to undervalue the good influence of Mr. Silo in our city. He has been a large and enterprising investor. He has built up the town in many ways. He has been charitable and patriotic. He was a good man; but he was not a saint. And a man has to be a saint to boom town lots and keep straight. No; I'll go further than that—it can't be done! George Washington

couldn't have boomed town lots and kept straight. And Silo, as you can see by those whiskers, was no George Washington. Real estate isn't sold on the Golden Rule, you know. There were times when it was mighty lucky for Silo that he was six feet high and weighed two hundred pounds.

I don't know the details of the transaction, but I am afraid that Silo treated the little newspaper man pretty shabbily. He was a decent, hard-working, unobtrusive little fellow, and he and his wife had been scraping and saving for years and years to buy a house with a garden to it, in just such a town as this. Well, no, that's not the way to put it. They had fixed on a particular house in this particular town, and they had been waiting several years for the lease of it to fall in. They were ready with the price, and I do not doubt that Silo or his agents had at one time accepted their offer for the place. But when the time came, Silo backed out, refused to sell, and disowned the whole transaction.

That, in itself, was a mean act. It was a trifling matter to Silo, but it was a biggest kind of matter to the other man and his wife. They had set their hearts on that particular house; they had stinted themselves for a long, long time to lay up the money to buy it; and probably no other house in the whole world could ever be so desirable to those two people. But that wasn't the worst of it. The man might have put up with his disappointment, and perhaps even have forgiven Silo for the shabby trick. But Silo, I

suppose, felt ashamed of himself and went further than he had meant to, in trying to lash himself into a real good, honest indignation. At least, that is my guess at it; for Silo was neither brutal nor stupid by nature; but on this occasion he had the incredible cussedness to twit the little man on his helplessness. It was purely a question of veracity between the two, and Silo pointed out that, as against him, nobody would take the stranger's word. That was true; but, good Lord! Silo himself told me subsequently that it was the meanest thing, under the circumstances, that he ever heard one man say to another. He always maintained that he was right about the sale; but he admitted that his roughing of the poor fellow was inexcusable; and the thing that graveled him most and frightened him most in the end was that he had called the poor man "Mr. Thingumajig." He had not caught the real name; he only remembered that it had some sort of a foreign sound that suggested "Thingumajig" to his mind.

Now, all that Silo had had before him previous to that outburst was only a plain case of angry man; but from that time on he had ahead of him through his pathway in life an incarnation of human hatred, out for vengeance, and bound to have it.

"Well, now the fun of the thing comes in," said the Doctor.

"I should think it was high time," said I.

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There was nothing very unusual in that little episode; but somehow it got public, and was a good deal talked about; although, as I said, hardly anybody knew the stranger, even by name. But, of course, it was well nigh forgotten six months later, when the newspaper man came to the front again.

His reappearance took the form of such a singular exhibition of meekness that it ought to have made Silo suspicious, to say the least. But he was a bit of a bully; and, like all bullies, it was hard for him to believe that a man who did not bluster could really mean fight. Perhaps he had no chance of mercy at that time; but if he did he threw it away.

The stranger wrote to the local paper a polite, even modest letter, stating, very moderately, his grievance against Mr. Silo. He further proposed a scheme, the adoption of which would obviate all possibilities of such misunderstanding. I have forgotten what the scheme was. It was not a good one, and I know now that it was not meant to be. The local paper was the *Echo*. It was run by a shiftless young man named Meecham; and, of course, Silo had him deep in his debt; and, of course, again, Silo more or less ran the paper. So, when that letter arrived, Meecham showed it to Silo, and Silo gave new cause of offense by violating the honorable laws of newspaper controversy, and answering back in the very same number of the paper. The matter of his reply was also injudicious. He lost his

temper at once when he saw that the letter was signed "Mr. Thingumajig," and he characterized both the plan and its proposer as "preposterous." I am inclined to think that that word "preposterous" was just the word that the other man was setting a trap for. At any rate, he got it, and he wanted nothing better. Here is his reply:

AN OPEN LETTER TO P. Q. SILO, Esq.

MY DEAR MR. SILO:

I greatly regret that my little scheme for the simplification of the relations between intending purchasers and non-intending sellers (so-called) of real estate should have fallen under your disapprobation. Of course, I do not attempt to question your judgment; but you must allow me to take exception to the language in which that judgment is expressed; which is at once inappropriate and insulting. You call me and my scheme "preposterous;" and this shows that you do not know the meaning of that frequently misused word. "Preposterous" is a word that may be properly applied to a scheme that puts the cart before the horse—"having that first which ought to be last," as Mr. Webster's International Dictionary puts it—or to a thing or creature "contrary to nature or reason; not adapted to the end; utterly and glaringly foolish; unreasonably absurd; perverted." If you want an instance of its proper application, the word "preposterous" might fitly be used in all its

senses to describe your own brief but startling appearance on Thursday evening last, between the hours of nine and ten, in a certain quiet street of New York, in a pair of pink pants.

I remain, dear sir,

Yours very truly,

MR. THINGUMAJIG.

That was all. Nothing more. But, as the line-man said of the two-thousand volt shock, “it isn’t necessary to see some things to know that they’re there.”

Now I want you to note the devilish ingenuity of that phraseology. To speak of “pink trousers” would serve only to call up an unattractive mental picture. “Pink breeches” would only suggest the satin knee-breeches of a page in a comic opera; but “pink pants” is a combination you can’t get out of your head. It is not English; the word “pants” is a vulgar contraction of the word pantaloons, and we don’t wear pantaloons in these days. But “pants” is the funniest word of its size that ever was invented, and it is just about the right word for the hideous garment it belongs to. And whether there’s any reason or logic in it or not, when I put those two little cheap words together and say “pink pants,” I am certain of two things. First, you have got to smile; second, you can’t forget it to save your neck. And that’s what Mr. Thingumajig knew. I think he had everything laid out in his mind just as it was going to happen.

Meecham got that letter, and laid it aside to show to Silo; but as he sat at his desk and worked, the salient phrase kept bobbing around in his mind; and, finally, he said aloud:

"Pink pants! What in thunder are pink pants, anyway?"

His foreman heard him, and looked at him in amazement.

"Pink pants," he repeated; "that's a new one on me."

Meecham picked up the letter again, and knit his brows as he studied it.

"That's right," he said; "that's what it is."

The foreman came and looked over his shoulder.

"Pink pants," he repeated; "that's right."

A man who had just come into the office looked at the two speakers with astonishment. Meecham knew that he had come to put an advertisement in the paper, and so he showed him the letter.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "That's right, though. It's 'pink pants,' on your life. But where in blazes would a man get pink pants, anyway?"

When Mr. Silo saw the letter he told Meecham to "burke" it; and Meecham put it in the waste-basket. The next day Silo made him take it out of the waste-basket and print it. He explained that so many people had asked him about the letter—and he said something to Meecham as to his methods of running the office—that he thought it better to print it and let the people see for themselves how absurd it was, or else they might

magnify it and think he was afraid to print it. Meecham did not say anything at the moment. He did not like being blown up any more than the rest of us do, however; and, when he had got the letter safely printed and out before the public, he said to Silo:

"You did just right about that letter. It wouldn't have done for a man of your position to have folks going around asking where you were on any particular Thursday evening."

"Why, no!" said Silo; "of course it wouldn't. Lemme see; was that the day the infernal crank picked out?"

"Thursday night, the eleventh," said Meecham, his finger on the calendar; "between nine and ten o'clock at night. Now, of course, Mr. Silo, you know just where you were then."

"Why, of course!" said Silo. "Lemme see, now. Thursday the eleventh, nine, ten at night. Why, I was—no—why, *Thursday, the eleventh!*—Oh, thunder!—no—it can't be! Oh, certainly! yes; that's all right, of course! Is that Mr. Smith over there, the other side of the street? I've got to speak to him a minute. I'll see you to-morrow. Good-night, my boy!"

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How much of an expert in human nature are you? If I tell you that Mr. Silo insisted on having every first impression of an edition of the *Echo* sent to his house by special messenger the instant it was printed, whether he was at home or

not, and that he did this just to make Meecham feel the bitterness of the servitude of debt, what do you deduce or infer from that? That somebody else was tyrannizing over Silo? Quite right! Mrs. Silo was a woman who opened all of her husband's letters—that came to the house. And she looked at Silo's paper before he saw it himself.

And when Silo got home that day, Mrs. Silo was waiting for him. Mrs. Silo and the copy of the *Echo*, with the letter concerning Mr. Silo and the pink pants. Mrs. Silo wanted to know about it. If Mr. Silo was in any doubt about Thursday night, the eleventh, Mrs. Silo was not. On that night Mr. Silo had been expected out on the train leaving New York at eight o'clock. He had arrived on the train leaving New York at ten o'clock. There was no trouble at all in identifying the night. Mrs. Silo reminded him that it was the night of the day when he took in a certain hank of red Berlin wool to be delivered to Mrs. Silo's mother, who lived in 14th Street; which, as Mrs. Silo remarked, is not a quiet street. She also reminded Mr. Silo that on his appearance that evening she had asked him if he had delivered that hank of red Berlin wool at the house of his mother-in-law, and he had answered that he had; that his lateness was due to that cause; and, furthermore, that his dear mother-in-law was very well.

To this Mr. Silo responded that his statements on Thursday evening were perfectly correct.

Then Mrs. Silo told him that since the arrival

of the paper she had made a trip to New York to inform herself as to the true condition of affairs. And, furthermore, on Thursday the eleventh, Mrs. Silo's mother had been confined to her bed all day with a severe neuralgic headache, all the other members of the family being absent at the bedside of a sick relative; the cook had had a day off, and the aged waitress, who had been in the family twenty-five years, was certain that no one had entered the house up to the return of the absent members at eight, sharp, when, the sick relative being by that time a dead relative, the house was closed. So much for furthermore. Now, moreover, the hank of red Berlin wool had arrived at the house in Fourteenth Street four days after the date in question. It came through the United States mail, wrapped up in a sheet of tinted note-paper, scented with musk, and addressed in a sprawling but unmistakably feminine hand.

Mr. Silo made an explanation. It was unsatisfactory.

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It had long been known in the town that suspicion was rife in the Silo household. It was now known that suspicion had ripened into certainty. Events of that kind belong to what may be classed as the masculine or strictly necessary and self-protective scandal. News of the event goes in hushed whispers through the masculine community—the brotherhood of man, as you might

say. One man says to his neighbor, "Let's get Johnston and go down to Coney Island this afternoon." "Johnston isn't going down to Coney Island this week," says the neighbor. "Johnston miscalculated his wine last night, and Mrs. Johnston is good people to leave alone this morning."

In a case so much more serious than a mere case of intoxication as Silo's was supposed to be, you can readily understand that the scandal of the pink pants spread through the town like wild-fire. Silo had already resigned from the vestry, so all the vestry could do was to pitch in and see that he did not get the ghost of a show as a candidate for assembly. It was not much of a job, under the circumstances, and the vestry did it very easily.

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"Well, but what *had* Silo done?" I asked the Doctor. "And what were the pink pants, anyway?"

"Silo hadn't done a thing," replied the Doctor. "Not a blessed thing—except to tell a tiny little bit of a two-for-one-cent fib about that hank of worsted. I met Mr. Thingumajig in Chicago last year, and he told me how he worked the whole scheme. The gist of the invention lay in the 'pink pants.' Any fool can put up a job to make a man's wife jealous; but it takes the genius of deathless malevolence to invent a phrase sure to catch every ear that hears it; sure to interest and

puzzle and excite every mind that gives it lodgment, and to tie that phrase up to an individuality in such a way that it conveys an accusation almost without form and void, and yet hideously suggestive of iniquity.

“That is just what the little newspaper cuss did with Silo. He was bent on revenge, and he gave up a certain portion of his time to shadowing him. You must remember that, while he had reason to remember Silo, Silo had hardly any to remember him. Well, he told me that he dogged Silo for days—months, even—trying to catch him in some wrong-doing. But Silo, big and blustering as he looked, with his whiskers and his knowing air, was an innocent, respectable, henpecked ass. Outside of business, all that he ever did in New York was to go to his mother-in-law’s house at his wife’s bidding to execute shopping commissions and the like. For instance, this hank of Berlin wool the old lady had bought for her daughter; the shade was wrong, and the daughter sent it back. Mr. Thingumajig—never mind his name now—had been tracking Silo on his trips to Fourteenth Street for weeks, and had just learned their innocent nature. His soul was full of rage. He got into a green car with Silo, going to the ferry. The evening was hot. Silo dozed in the corner of the car. The hank of red Berlin wool lay on the seat beside him. Mr. Thingumajig saw it, and saw the letter pinned to it, addressed by Mrs. Silo to her mother. In that instant he conceived the crude basis of his plot—

to appropriate the hank, suppress the letter, souse the wool with cheap perfume, get his wife to re-address the parcel in her worst hand—and to rely in pretty good confidence on Silo's telling a lie at one end or both ends of the line about the missing wool. Silo was not much of a sinner, but a man who loses his wife's hank of Berlin wool and goes home and owns up about it is a good deal of a saint. The chances were all in Mr. Thingumajig's favor."

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"But," said I, "when you had met Mr. Thingumajig and became possessed of the plot, why didn't you come back here and tell all about it, and clear up poor Silo?"

The Doctor looked at me pityingly, almost contemptuously.

"My dear fellow," he said, as if he were talking to a child, "what was my word to those pink pants? I tried it on, until I found that people simply began to suspect me, and to think that I might be Silo's accomplice in iniquity. There wasn't the least use in it. If I talked to a man, he would hear me through; and then he would wag his head and say, 'That's all very well; but how about those pink pants? If there weren't any pink pants how did they come to be mentioned?' And that was the way everywhere. I could explain all about poor Silo's foolish little lie, and they would say, 'Oh, yes, that's possible; a man might lie about a hank of wool if he had the kind

of wife Silo's got; but how about those pink pants?' And when it wasn't *those* pink pants, it was *them* pink pants. And after a while I gave it up. Silo had got to drinking pretty hard by that time, in order to drown his miseries; and of course that only confirmed the earlier scandal. Now, Silo never was a man that could drink; it never did agree with him, and he has got so wild recently that Mrs. Silo has her two brothers take turns to come out here and try to control him. Of course that makes him all the wilder."

At the end of Main Street I parted from my friend, the Doctor, and shortly I crossed the pathway of another citizen who had seen the two of us bidding good-by.

"He's a nice man, the Doctor is," said the citizen; "but the trouble with him is, he's altogether too credulous and sympathetic. Now, I wouldn't be surprised if he'd been making some defense to you of the goings on of that man Silo. He's a sort of addled on that subject. May be it's just pure charity, of course; and may be, equally, he was in with Silo when Silo wasn't so openly disgraceful; but if you want to know what that man Silo is, I'll tell you. The people around here, sir—the people who ought to know—do you know what they call him, sir? Well, sir, they call him, 'The Man with the Pink Pants.' And do you suppose for one minute, sir, that a man gets a name fixed on him like that without he's deserved it? No, sir; your friend there is a good man, and a charitable man, but as for judgment

of character, he ain't got it. And if you're a friend of his, you'll tell him that the less he has to say about 'The Man with the Pink Pants'—the better for *him*."

THE THIRD FIGURE IN THE COTILLION

AROUND the little island of Ausserland the fishing-smacks hover all through the season. They rarely go out of sight; or, indeed, stand far off shore, for life is easy in Ausserland, and the famous Ausserland herrings, which give the island its prosperity, are oftenest to be caught in the broad reaches of shallow water that surround the island. Beyond these reaches there are fish, too; but out there the waters are more turbulent. And why should a fisherman risk his life and his beautiful brown duck sails in treacherous seas, when he has his herring-pond at his own door-step, so to speak. And they have a saying in Ausserland that if you are drowned you may go to heaven; but certainly not to Ausserland.

And who would want to leave Ausserland? Life is so easy there that it takes most of the inhabitants about ninety years to die—and even then you can hardly call it dying. Life's pendulum only slows down day by day, and swings through an arc that imperceptibly diminishes as the years go on, until at last, without surprise, without shock, almost without regret, so gradual is the process, you perceive that it has stopped.

And then the whole village, all in Sunday clothes, marches out to the little graveyard on the hill, and somebody's great birchen beer-mug is hung on the living-room wall in memory of one who ate and drank and slept, and who is no more. There are rooms in those old houses in Ausserland where the wooden mugs hang in a double row, and the oldest of them was last touched by living lips in days when the dragon-ships of the Vikings ploughed that Northern sea.

Ausserland is a principality, and a part of a mighty empire; but except that it has to pay its taxes, and in return is guaranteed immunity from foreign invasion, it might just as well be an independent kingdom; or, rather, an independent state, for it is governed by Burgesses, elected by the people to administer laws made hundreds of years ago, and still quite good and suitable. If a man steals his neighbor's goods, he is put in the pillory. But what should a man steal his neighbor's goods for when he has all the goods that he wants of his own? The last time the pillory was used was for a shipwrecked Spanish sailor who refused to go to church on the ground of a rooted prejudice against the Protestant religion. And it must have been a singularly comfortable pillory, for somehow or other he managed to carve his name on it during the hour in which he stood there—his name and the date of the event, and there they are to this day: "Miguel Diaz jul 6 1743." My own opinion is that they did not even let the top-piece down on him.

The men of Ausserland are not liable to conscription, and as no ships of war ever come to their odd corner of the sea, they know no more of the mighty struggles of their great empire than if they were half a world away. This is a part of the beautiful understanding which the Ausserlanders have established with their hereditary Prince and with the imperial government. The Prince lives at the court of the Emperor, and none of his line has seen Ausserland since his grandfather was there in the last century for a day's visit. Yet his relations with his subjects are of a permanently pleasant nature. They pay him his taxes, of which he hands over the lion's share to the government, keeping enough for himself to attire his plump person in beautiful uniforms and tight cavalry boots, and to cultivate the most beautiful port-wine nose in the whole court. The amount of the taxes has been settled long ago, and it is always exactly the same. The Ausserland fishermen are like a sort of deep-sea Dutchmen, independent, sturdy and shrewd. They know just how much they ought to pay; and they pay it, and not one soumarkee more or less. Ages ago the hereditary Princes discovered that if they put up the tax-rate, the herring fisheries promptly failed just in the necessary proportion to bring the assessment back to the old figure. When they lowered the rate the accommodating herring came back. It was a curious if not pleasing freak of nature to which they had to accustom themselves, for it never would have done to leave

the market open to any other supply of herrings than the famous herrings of Ausserland. So that question settled itself.

Twice a year the finest of the broad-breasted fishing smacks sailed for the distant mainland, bearing heavy cargoes of dried fish, and beautiful seashells such as were to be found nowhere else. Twice a year they came back, bringing cloths and calicoes, always of the same quality, color and pattern, for the fashions never change in Ausserland. They brought also drugs and medicines, school-books and pipes, tools and household utensils of the finer sort, more delicate than the Ausserland ironsmiths could fashion; brandy and cordials and wine in casks great and small, and the few other articles of commerce for which they were dependent upon the outer world; for the Ausserlanders supplied their own needs for the most part, spun their own linen, tanned their own leather, built their own boats, and generally "did" for themselves, as they say in New England. Then it was, and then only, that the newspapers came to Ausserland—a six-months' collection of newspapers at each trip. And the Head Burgess read them for the whole town. The Head Burgess was always a man who had reached that period of thrift and prosperity at which it seemed futile to toil longer, and who was both willing and able to give his whole leisure to affairs of state. He it was who collected and forwarded the taxes, and who stood ready to punish offenders, should any one feel tempted to offend.

The Head Burgess always grumbled a good deal, and talked much of the burdens of public life; but it was observant among even the unobservant Ausserlanders that the Head Burgess was usually the fattest man in town; and the post was much sought after because few Head Burgesses had been known to die under ninety-two or three years of age.

As a rule, the Head Burgess read slowly and with deliberation. Of a June afternoon, when the fishermen came in from their day's work, he would stroll leisurely down to the wharves, with his long pipe with the painted china bowl, and would give forth the news of the day to the fishermen.

"Three families," he would say, "were frozen to death in Hamburg."

"Ah, indeed!" some courteous listener would respond; "and when was that?"

"In February last," the Head Burgess would reply; "it seems scandalous, does it not, that people should never learn to go in-doors and keep the fires lighted in Winter? Thank heaven, we have no such idiots here!"

For an Ausserlander can never understand what it means to be poor or needy. How can anybody want, he argues, while there are millions of herring in the sea, and they come along every year just at the same time?

In Spring, of course, the Head Burgess gave the Ausserlanders a budget of news that began with the preceding Summer. They listened to it politely, as they listened to the pastor's sermons.

Outside of the market-reports they had little interest in the world which ate their herrings. Still, they were a polite and intelligent people, and they were willing for once in a way to lend a courteous and attentive ear to the doings and sayings of people who were not happy enough to live in Ausserland. Thus it happened that they knew, several months after it occurred, of the death of the reigning Emperor and the accession to the throne of his son. The news was received with just the least shade of disapproval. The preceding Emperor had come to the throne a sick man, and had reigned but a short time. *His* father had reigned about as long as an Emperor can possibly reign, and they felt that he had done what was expected of him. They hoped that their Emperors were not going to get into the habit of reigning for a few months and then dying. It was annoying, they thought, to have to learn new names every few years.

So it is not remarkable that the new Emperor had been several months on his throne before the good people of Ausserland learned that he was a very peculiar young man, with a character of his own, and with a passion, that almost amounted to a mania, for re-establishing an ancient order of things that had well-nigh perished from the face of the earth. Nor is it to be wondered at that, considering all news of the court as frivolous and probably fictitious, they were utterly ignorant of a controversy that had divided the whole social system of the empire into two camps.

Who could expect that in the cosy, well-furnished rooms of the weather-beaten old houses of Ausserland it should be known that there was a vast commotion in the Imperial court over the new cotillion introduced by the Lord Chamberlain? It was a charming cotillion, all agreed; the music was ravishing, and the figures were exquisitely original; but the third figure—ah, there was the trouble!—the third figure had not met with the approval of the matrons. The young girls and the very young married women all liked it; and the men were as a unit in its favor; but the more elderly ladies thought that it was indelicate, and that it afforded opportunities for objectionable familiarities. A hot war was raged between the two parties. The Emperor, of course, was arbiter. He hesitated long. He was a very young man, and he took himself very much in earnest. To him a matter of court punctilio had an importance scarcely second to that of the fate of nations. As soon as an objection was offered, he issued an edict proscribing the performance of the dance of dubious propriety until such time as he should have made up his imperial mind as to its character. For three months its fate trembled in the balance. Then he decided that it should be and continue to be; and he issued a formal proclamation to that effect—the first formal proclamation of his reign. It was an opportunity for the re-introduction of ancient and ancestral methods which the young Emperor could not lose. The edict had gone forth in

haste by word of mouth and by notice in the daily papers; but he resolved that the proclamation should go by special envoy to all the principalities that composed his powerful empire. Accordingly, an officer of high rank, specially despatched from the court, read his Imperial Majesty's proclamation in every principality of the nation; and thereafter it was legitimate and proper to dance the third figure of the new Lord Chamberlain's cotillion on all occasions of lordly festivities, and all the elderly ladies accepted the situation with a cheerful submissiveness, and set about using it for scandal-mongering purposes with promptitude and alacrity.

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Early one Midsummer morning a strange fishing-smack was sighted from the Ausserland wharves far out at sea, beating up against an obstinate wind, and coming from the direction of the mainland. This in itself was enough to cause general comment and to stir the whole village with a thrill of interest; for strange vessels rarely came that way, except under stress of storm; and though the sea was running unusually high there had been no storm in many days. Besides, why should a vessel obviously unfitted for that sort of sailing, beat up against a wind that would take her to the mainland in half the time? Yet there she was, making for the island in long, laborious tacks.

Everybody stopped work to look at her; but work was suspended and utterly thrown aside when she hoisted a pennant that, according to the nautical code, signified that she had on board an Envoy from his Imperial Majesty.

The whole town was astir in a moment. The shops and schools closed. The village band began to practice as it had never practiced before. The burgesses and other officials donned their garments of state. A committee was promptly appointed to prepare a public banquet worthy of the Emperor's messenger. The children were sent collecting flowers, and were instructed how to strew them in his path. The bell-ringers gathered and arranged an elaborate programme of chimes. The citizens got into their Sunday clothes, which were most wonderful clothes in their way; and the town-crier, who played the trumpet, got his instrument out and polished it up until it shone like gold. But the man who felt most of the burden of responsibility upon his shoulders was the Head Burgess. He got into his robes of office as quickly as his wife and his three daughters could array him, and then he hastened to the Rathhaus, or Town Hall, and there consulted the archives to find out from the records of his predecessors what it became him to do when his Majesty's Envoy should announce his errand. He must make a speech, that was clear, for the honor of the Island. But what speech should he make? He could not compose one on the

instant—in fact, he could not compose one at all. What had his forerunners done on like occasions? He looked over the record and found that three King's Envoys had landed on the Island: one in 1699, to announce that the Island had been ceded by one kingdom to another; another in 1764, to inform the people that the great-grandmother of the hereditary Prince was dead; and another in 1848, to proclaim that the Islanders' right of exemption from conscription was suspended. In not one of these cases, it should be remarked, did the message of King, Prince or Emperor, change the face of affairs on the Island in the smallest degree. The herring market remaining stable, the Ausserlanders cared no whit to whom they paid taxes; as to the death of the Prince's great-grandmother, they simply remarked that it was a pity to die at the early age of eighty-seven; and when they were told that they would have to get up a draft and be conscripted into the army or navy, they just went fishing, and there the matter dropped. One is not an Ausserlander for nothing.

But the Head Burgess found that the same speech had been used on all three occasions. It was short, and he had little difficulty in committing it to memory, for it took the ship of his Majesty's Envoy six good hours to get into port. This was the speech:

“Noble and Honorable, Well and High-Born Sir, the people of Ausserland desire through

their representative, the Head Burgess, to affirm their unwavering loyalty to the most illustrious and high-born personage who condescends to assume the government of a loyal and independent populace, and to express the hope that Divine Providence may endow him with such power and capacity as properly befit a so-situated ruler.”

So heartily did the whole population throw itself into the work of preparing to receive the distinguished visitor, that everything had been in readiness a full hour, when, in the early afternoon, the fishing-smack finally made her landing. During this long hour, the whole town watched the struggles of the little boat with the baffling wind and waves. Everybody was in a state of delighted expectancy. An Emperor's Envoy does not call on one every day, and his coming offered an excuse for merry-making such as the prosperous and easy-going people of Ausserland were only too willing to seize.

So, when the boat made fast to the wharf, the signal guns boomed, and the people cheered again and again, and threw their caps in the air when the King's Envoy appeared from the cabin and returned the salute of the Head Burgess.

And, indeed, the King's Envoy was a most satisfactory and gratifying spectacle of grandeur. He was so grand and so gorgeous generally that he might have been taken for the hereditary Prince, himself, had it not been well

known that the color of the hereditary Prince's nose was unchangeable—being what the ladies call a fast red—whereas, this gentleman's face was as white as the Head Burgess's frilled shirt-front. But his clothes! So splendid a uniform was never seen before. Some of it was of cobalt blue and some of it of Prussian blue, and some of it of white; and, all over, in every possible place, it was decorated with a gold lace and gold buttons and silken frogs and tassels, and every other device of beauty that ingenuity could suggest, with complete disregard of cost.

And then His Serene Highness, Herr Graf Maximilian von Bummelberg, of Schloss Bummelfels in the Schwarzwald, stepped on the wharf and graciously introduced himself to the representative of the people, who grasped him warmly by the hand with a cordiality untempered by awe; and the people shouted again as they saw the two great men together; and not one suspected the anguish hidden by that martial outside. For, of course, as such things will happen, the Envoy selected to carry the Emperor's proclamation to this marine principality was a man who had never been to sea in his life, and who never would have made a sailor if he had been kept at sea until he was pickled. And for eighteen hours the unfortunate messenger of good tidings had been tossed about in the dark, close, malodorous little cabin of a fishing-smack on the breast of a chopping sea, beating up against a strong head wind. And,

oh! had he not been sick? Sick, sick, sick, and then again sick—so sick, indeed, that he had had to hide his gorgeous clothes under a sailor's dirty tarpaulin. This made him feel sicker yet; but, though in the course of the trip he lost his respect for mankind, including himself, for royalty, for religion, for life and for death, he still retained a vital spark of respect for his beautiful clothes. He stood motionless upon the wharf and returned the compliments of the Head Burgess in a husky voice that sounded in his own ears strange and far off. The Herr Graf Maximilian von Bummelberg, of Schloss Bummelfels in the Schwarzwald, Envoy of his Imperial Majesty, was waiting for the ground to steady itself, for it was behaving as it had never behaved before, to his knowledge. It rolled and it heaved, it flew up and it nearly hit him in the face, then it slipped away from under him and rocked back again sidewise. Never having been on an island before, the King's Envoy might have thought that the land was really afloat if he had not seen that the wine in the silver cup which the Burgess was presenting to him was swinging around like everything else without spilling a drop.

Things began to settle a little after the Envoy had drunk the wine, and when he had found that there was actually a carriage to take him to the Town Hall, he brightened up wonderfully. He was much pleased to see also that the Town Hall was solidly built of brick, and

that it was to a stone balcony that he was led to read his proclamation to the people. Grasping the balustrade firmly with one hand, he read to the surging crowd before him—he had heard of surging crowds before, but now he saw one that really did surge—the message of his Imperial Master. The proclamation was exceedingly brief, except for the recital of the titles of the Emperor. The body of the document ran as follows:

“I announce to my faithful, loyal and devoted subjects of the honorable principality of Ausserland, that hereafter, by my favor and pleasure, the use of the Third Figure in the Cotillion is graciously granted to them without further restriction. Done, under my hand and seal, this first day of July, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and ninety-two.”

That was all. The people listened attentively and cheered enthusiastically. Then the Envoy handed the proclamation and his credentials to the Head Burgess, with a bow and a flourish, and signified his intention of returning at once by the way he had come. Nor could any entreaties prevail upon him even to stay to the banquet already spread. He told the Burgesses, with many compliments and assurances of his lofty esteem, that he had another principality to notify before six o'clock the next morning, and that the business of his Imperial Master admitted of not so much as a moment's delay. The truth of the matter, however, he kept to

himself. For one thing, he could not have gazed upon food without disastrous results. For another, he was experiencing an emotion which in any other than a military breast would have been fear. He had but one wish in the world, and that was to get back to the mainland, the breeze being in his favor going back and promising a quicker passage. Indeed it was with difficulty that he repressed a mad desire to ask the Head Burgess whether the island ever fetched loose and floated further out, or sank to the bottom. However, he maintained his dignity to the last; and, a half an hour later, as the people watched the fishing-smack with the Imperial ensign sail forth upon the dancing sea, bearing the Herr Graf Maximilian von Bummelberg, of Schloss Bummelfels in the Schwarzwald, they all agreed that, for a short visit, he made a very satisfactory King's Envoy.

But they could banquet very well without assistance from Envoys or anybody, and they sat them down in the great hall of the Rathaus, and they fell upon the smoked herring and the fresh herring, and the pickled herring, and the smoked goose-breast and the potato salad, and all the rest of the good things, and they drank great tankards of home-made beer, and great flagons of imported Rhenish wine; and, after that, they smoked long pipes and chatted contentedly, mainly about the herring-market.

They had reached this stage in the proceedings before it occurred to any one in the com-

pany to broach the comparatively uninteresting subject of the Imperial proclamation, and then somebody said in a casual way that he did not think he had quite caught the sense of it. Soon it appeared that no one else had. The Head Burgess was puzzled. "I have just copied it into the Town Archives," he said; "but, upon my soul, I never thought of considering the sense of it." So the document was taken from the ponderous safe of the Rathhaus and passed around among the goodly company, each one of whom read it slowly through and smoked solemnly over it. The Head Burgess was appealed to for the meaning of the word "cotillion." He had to confess that he did not exactly know. He believed, however, that it was a custom-house word, and had reference to the gauging of proof spirits. Then the Doctor was asked his opinion. He said, somewhat uneasily, that he thought it was one of the new chemicals recently derived from coal tar; but, with all due respect to his Imperial Majesty, he took no stock in such new-fangled nonsense, and castor-oil would be good enough for his patients while he lived. The School-Master would know, some one suggested; but the School-Master had gone home early, being in expectation of an addition to his family. The Dominie took a hand in the discussion, and calling attention to the word figure, opined that it belonged to some branch of astronomy hitherto under the ban of the universities on account of its tendency to

unsettle the minds of young men and promote the growth of infidelity. He lamented the atheistical tendency of modern times, and shook his head gravely as he said he hoped that the young Emperor would not be led astray.

Many suggestions were made; so many, indeed, that, it being plainly impossible to arrive at a consensus of opinion, the subject was dropped; and, wrapped in great clouds of tobacco smoke, the conversation made its way back to the herring fisheries.

But, later in the night, as the Head Burgess and the Doctor strolled slowly homeward, smoking their pipes in the calm moonlight, the question came up again, and they were earnestly discussing it in deep, sonorous tones when they came in front of the house of the School-Master, and saw by a light in the window of his study that he was still waiting the pleasure of Mrs. School-Master. They rapped with their pipes on the door-post, giving the signal that had often called their old friend forth to late card-parties at the tavern, and in a couple of minutes—for no one hurries in Ausserland—he appeared at the door in his old green dressing-gown and with his long-stemmed pipe in his mouth.

Now, the School-Master was not only a man of profound learning, but a man of rapid mental processes. He had heard from his open window the discussion as his two friends slowly came down the street; and, in point of fact, his professional instinct had led him to note the mystic

word when it dropped from the Envoy's lips. This it was, rather than domestic expectations, that had kept him awake so late. And in the time that elapsed between the arrival of his friends and his appearance at the door, he had prepared himself to meet the situation.

He listened solemnly to the question with the tolerant interest of a man of science, and he answered it without hesitation, in the imposing tone of perfect knowledge.

"A cotillion," he said, decisively, "is the one-billionth part of a minus million in quaternions, and is used by surveyors to determine the logarithm of the cube root. That is, its use has hitherto been forbidden to the government surveyors on account of the uncertainty of the formula. That, however, has been finally determined by Prof. Lipsius, of Munich, and hereafter it may be applied to delicate calculations in determining the altitude of mountains too lofty for ascent. Gentlemen, I should like to ask you in to take a night-cap with me, but, under the circumstances, you understand . . . Doctor, I don't think we shall need you to-night. Good-evening, friends."

The Doctor and the Head Burgess ruminated over this new acquisition to their stock of knowledge as they strolled on down the street. At last the latter broke the silence and said, in a tone in which conviction struggled with sleepiness:

"Doctor, I have often thought what a hard

life those poor devils on the mainland must have with their impassable mountains, and their railroads that kill and mangle you if they get a millionth part of a cube root out of the way, and the boundary-lines they are everlastingly quarreling about. Why, here in Ausserland, see how simple it all is! We never have any trouble about our boundary-lines. Where the land stops the water begins, and where the land begins the water stops; and that's all there is to it!"

And with these words, as the last puff of his pipe rose heavenward, the Burgess dismissed the matter from his mind, and the Emperor's proclamation legitimizing the Third Figure of the Cotillion vanished from his memory—and from that of all Ausserland—passing into oblivion with those that had told of Ausserland's change of nationality, of the conscription of her exempt citizens, and of the death of the great-grandmother of the hereditary Prince.

“SAMANTHA BOOM-DE-AY”

IT was a long, rough, sunlit stretch of stony turnpike that climbed across the flanks of a mountain range in Maine, and skirted a great forest for many miles, on its way to an upland farming-country near the Canada border.

As you ascended this road, on your right hand was a continuous wall of dull-hued evergreens, straggly pines and cedars, crowded closely and rising high above a thick underbrush. Behind this lay the vast, mysterious, silent wilderness. Here and there the emergence of a foamy, rushing river, or the entrance of a narrow corduroy road or trail, afforded a glimpse into its depths, and then you saw the slopes of hills and valleys, clad ever in one smoky, bluish veil of fir and pine.

On the other hand, where you could see through the roadside brush, you looked down the mountain slope to the plains below, where the brawling mountain streams quieted down into pleasant water-courses; where broad patches of meadow land and wheat field spread out from edges of the woods, and where, far, far off, clusters of farm-houses, and further yet, towns and villages, sent their smoke up above the hazy horizon.

It was a road of so much variety and sweep of view, as it kept its course along the boundary of the forest's dateless antiquity, and yet in full view of the prosperous outposts of a well-established civilization, that the most calloused traveler might have been expected to look about him and take an interest in his surroundings. But the three people who drove slowly up this hill one August afternoon might have been passing through a tunnel for all the attention they paid to the shifting scene.

Their vehicle was a farm-wagon; a fine, fresh-painted Concord wagon. The horses that drew it were large, sleek, and a little too fat. A comfortable country prosperity appeared in the whole outfit; and, although the raiment of the three travelers was unfashionably plain, they all three had an aspect of robust health and physical well-being, which was much at variance with their dismal countenances—for the middle-aged man who was driving looked sheepish and embarrassed; the good-looking, sturdy young fellow by his side was clearly in a state of frank, undisguised dejection, and the black-garbed woman, who sat behind in a splint-bottomed chair, had the extra-hard granite expression of the New England woman who particularly disapproves of something; whether that something be the destruction of her life's best hopes or her neighbor's method of making pie.

For mile after mile they jogged along in

silence. Occasionally the elder man would make some brief and commonplace remark in a tentative way, as though to start a conversation. To these feeble attempts the young man made no response whatever. The woman in black sometimes nodded and sometimes said "Yes?" with a rising inflection, which is a form of torture invented and much practiced in the New England States.

It was late in the afternoon when a noise behind and below them made them all glance round. The middle-aged man drew his horses to one side; and, in a cloud of dust, a big, old-fashioned stage of a dull-red color overtook them and lumbered on its way, the two drivers interchanging careless nods.

The woman did not alter her rigid attitude, and kept her eyes cast down; but the passing of the stage awakened a noticeable interest in the two men on the front seat. The elder gazed with surprise and curiosity at the freight that the top of the stage-coach bore—three or four traveling trunks of unusual size, shape and color, clamped with iron and studded with heavy nails.

"Be them trunks?" he inquired, staring open-mouthed at the sight. "I never seen trunks like them before."

Neither of his companions answered him; but a curious new expression came into the young man's face. He sat up straight for the first time; and, as the wagon drew back into the

narrow road, he began to whistle softly and melodiously.

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When Samantha Spaulding was left a widow with a little boy, she got, as one of her neighbors expressed it, “more politeness than pity.” In truth, in so far as the condition has any luck about it, Samantha was lucky in her widowhood. She was a young widow, and a well-to-do widow. Old man Spaulding had been a good provider and a good husband, but he was much older than his wife, and had not particularly engaged her affections. Now that he was dead, after some eighteen months of married life, and had left her one of the two best farms in the county, everybody supposed that Mis’ Spaulding would marry Reuben Pett, who owned the other best farm, besides a saw-mill and a stage-route. That is, everybody thought so, except Samantha and Pett. They calmly kept on in their individual ways, and showed no inclination to join their two properties, though these throve and waxed more and more valuable year by year. They were good friends, however. Reuben Pett was a sagacious counselor, and a prudent man of affairs; and when Samantha’s boy became old enough to work, he was apprenticed to Mr. Pett, to the end that he might some day take charge of the saw-mill business, which his mother stood ready to buy for him.

But the youthful Baxter Spaulding had not

reached the age of twenty when he cast down his mother's hopes in utter ruin by coming home from a business trip to Augusta and announcing that he was going to marry, and that the bride of his choice was a young lady of the variety stage who danced for a living, her specialty being known as "hitch-and-kick."

Now, this may not seem, to you who read this, quite a complete, perfect and unimprovable thing in the way of the abomination of desolation; but then you must remember that you were not born and raised in a far corner of the Maine hills, and that you probably have so frequently seen play-actress-women of all sorts that the mere idea of them has ceased to give you cold creeps down your back. And to Samantha Spaulding the whole theatrical system, from the Tragic Muse to the "hitch-and-kick artiste," was conceived in sin and born in iniquity; and what her son proposed to do was to her no whit better than forgery, arson, or any other ungodliness. To you of a less distinctively Aroostook code of morals, I may say that the enchainers of young Spaulding's heart was quite as good a little girl in her morals and her manners as you need want to find on the stage or off it; and "hitch-and-kick" dancing was to her only a matter of business, as serio-comic singing had been to her mother, as playing Harlequin had been to her father, and as grinning through a horse-collar had been to her grandfather and great-grandfather, famous old

English clowns in their day, one of whom had been a partner of Grimaldi. She made her living, it is true, by traveling around the country singing a song called “Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay,” which required a great deal of high kicking for its just and full artistic expression; but then, it should be remembered, it was the way she had always made her living, and her mother’s living, too, since the old lady lost her serio-comic voice. And as her mother had taught her all she knew about dancing, and as she and her mother had hardly been separated for an hour since she was out of her cradle, Little Betty Billington looked on her profession, as you well may imagine, with eyes quite different from those with which Mrs. Samantha Spaulding regarded it. It was a lopsided contest that ensued, and that lasted for months. On one side were Baxter and his Betty and Betty’s mama—after that good lady got over her natural objections to having her daughter marry “out of the profession.” On the other side was Samantha, determined enough to be a match for all three of them. Mr. Reuben Pett hovered on the outskirts, asking only peace.

At last he was dragged into the fight. Baxter Spaulding went to Bangor, where his lady’s company happened to be playing, with the avowed intention of wedding Betty out of hand. When his mother found it out, she took Reuben Pett and her boy’s apprenticeship indenture to Bangor with her, caught the youngster ere the deed was done, and, having the majesty of the

law behind her, she was taking her helpless captive home on this particular August afternoon. He was on the front seat of the wagon, Samantha was on the splint-bottomed chair, and Reuben Pett was driving.

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It was a two-days' drive from the railroad station at Byram's Pond around the spur of the mountain to their home. The bi-weekly stage did it in a day; but it was unwonted traveling for Mr. Pett's easy-going team. Therefore, the three travelers put up at Canada Jake's camp; so-called, though it was only on the edge of the wilderness, because it was what Maine people generally mean when they talk of a "camp"—a large shanty of rough, unpainted planks, with a kitchen and eating-room below, and rudely partitioned sleeping-rooms in the upper story. It stood by the roadside, and served the purpose of an inn.

Canada Jake was lounging in the doorway as they came up, squat, bullet-headed and bead-eyed; a very ordinary specimen of mean French Canadian. He welcomed them in as if he were conferring a favor upon them, fed them upon black, fried meat and soggy, boiled potatoes, and later on bestowed them in three wretched enclosures overhead.

He himself stayed awake until the sound of two bass and one treble snore penetrated the thin partition planks; and then he stole softly

up the ladder that served for stairway, and slipped into the moonlit little room where Baxter Spaulding was lying on a cot-bed six inches too short for him. Putting his finger upon his lips, he whispered to the wakeful youth:

“Sh-h-h-h-h-h! You got you’ boots on?”

“No,” said Baxter softly.

“Come wiz me and don’ make no noise!”

And the next thing that Baxter Spaulding knew, he was outside of the house, behind the wood-pile, holding a slight but charming figure in his arms, and saying:

“Why, Betty! why, Betty!” in a dazed sort of way, while a fat and motherly lady near by stood shaking with silent sobs, like a jelly-fish convulsed with sympathy and affection.

“We ’eaded you off in the stage-coach!” was all she said.

The next morning Mr. Reuben Pett was called out of the land of dreams by a familiar feminine voice from the next room.

“Reuben Pett!” it said; “*where is Baxter?*”

“Baxter!” yelled Mr. Pett; “your ma wants yer!”

But Baxter came not. His room was empty. Mr. Pett descended and found his host out by the wood-pile, splitting kindling. Canada Jake had seen nothing whatever of the young man. He opined that the youth most ’ave got up airlee, go feeshin’.

Reuben Pett went back and reported to Samantha Spaulding through the door. Saman-

tha's voice came back to him as a voice from the bottom sub-cellar of abysmal gloom.

"Reuben," she said; "them women have been here!"

"Why, Samantha!" he said; "it ain't possible!"

"I heard them last night," returned Samantha, in tones of conviction. "I know, now, I did. I thought then I was dreamin'."

"Most likely you was, too!" said Mr. Pett, encouragingly.

"Well, I wa'n't!" rejoined Mrs. Spaulding, with a suddenness and an acerbity that made her listener jump. "*They've stole my clothes!*"

"Whatever do you mean, Samantha?" roared Reuben Pett.

"I mean," said Mrs. Spaulding, in a tone that left no doubt whatever that what she did mean she meant very hard; "I mean that that hussy has been here in the night, and has took every stitch and string of my clothing, and ain't left me so much as a button-hole, except—except—except—"

"Except what?" demanded Reuben, in stark amazement.

"Except that there idolatrous flounced frock the shameless critter doos her stage-dancing in!"

Mr. Pett might, perhaps, have offered appropriate condolences on this bereavement had not a thought struck him which made him scramble down the ladder again and hasten to the woodshed, where he had put up his team the night

before. The team was gone—the fat horses and fresh-painted wagon, and the tracks led back down the road up which they had ridden the day before.

Once more Mr. Pett climbed the ladder; but when he announced his loss he was met, to his astonishment, with severity instead of with sympathy.

“I don’t care, Reuben Pett,” Samantha spoke through the door, “if you’ve lost ten horses and nineteen wagons. You got to hitch some kind of a critter to *suthin’*, for we’re goin’ to ketch them people to-day or my name’s not Samantha Spaulding.”

“But Law Sakes Alive, Samantha!” expostulated Mr. Pett; “you ain’t goin’ to wear no circus clothes, be ye?”

“You go hunt a team, Mr. Pett,” returned his companion, tartly; “I know my own business.”

Mr. Pett remonstrated. He pointed out that there was neither horse nor vehicle to be had in the neighborhood, and that pursuit was practically hopeless in view of the start which the runaways had. But Mrs. Spaulding was obdurate with an obduracy that made the heart of Reuben Pett creep into his boots. After ten minutes of vain combating, he saw, beyond a doubt, that the chase would have to continue even if it were to be carried on astraddle a pair of confiscated cows. Having learned that much, he went drearily down again to discuss the situ-

ation with Canada Pete. Canada Pete was indisposed to be of the slightest assistance, until Mr. Pett reminded him of the danger of the law in which he stands who aids a runaway apprentice in his flight. After that, the sulky Canadian awoke to a new and anxious interest; and, before long, he remembered that a lumberer who lived "a piece" up the road had a bit of meadow-land reclaimed from the forest, and sometimes kept an old horse in it. It was a horse, however, that had always positively refused to go under saddle, so that a new complication barred the way, until suddenly the swarthy face of the *habitant* lit up with a joyful, white-toothed grin.

"My old calèche zat I bring from Canada! I let you have her, hey? You come wiz me!"

And Canada Pete led the way through the underbrush to a bit of a clearing near his house, where were accumulated many years' deposits of household rubbish; and here, in a desert of tin-cans and broken bottles and crockery, stood the oldest of all old calashes.

There are calashes and calashes, but the calash or calèche of Canada is practically of one type. It is a high-hung, tilting chaise, with a commodious back seat and a capacious hood, and with an absurd, narrow, cushioned bar in front for the driver to sit on. It is a startling-looking vehicle in its mildest form, and when you gaze upon a calash for the first time you will probably wonder whether, if a stray boy should catch on behind, the shafts would not fly up

into the air, bearing the horse between them. Canada Pete's calash had evidently stood long a monument of decay, yet being of sturdy and simple construction, it showed distinct signs of life when Pete seized its curved shafts and ran it backward and forward to prove that the wheels could still revolve and the great hood still nod and sway like a real calash in commission. It was ragged, it was rusty, it was water-soaked and weather-beaten, blistered and stained; but it hung together, and bobbed along behind Canada Pete, lurching and rickety, but still a vehicle, and entitled to rank as such.

The calash was taken into Pete's back-yard; and then, after a brief and energetic campaign, Pete secured the horse, which was a very good match for the calash. He was an old horse, and he had the spring-halt. He held his long ewe-neck to one side, being blind in one eye; and this gave him the coquettish appearance of a mincing old maid. A little polka step, which he affected with his fore-feet, served to carry out this idea.

Also, he had been feeding on grass for a whole Summer, and his spirits were those of the young lambkin that gambols in the mead. He was happy, and he wanted to make others happy, although he did not seem always to know the right way to go about it. When Mr. Pett and Canada Pete had got this animal harnessed up with odds and ends of rope and leather, they sat down and wiped their brows. Then Mr.

Pett started off to notify Mrs. Samantha Spaulding.

Mr. Pett was a man unused to feminine society, except such as he had grown up with from early childhood, and he was of a naturally modest, even bashful disposition. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was startled when, on re-entering the living-room of Canada Pete's camp, he found himself face to face with a strange lady, and a lady, at that, of a strangeness that he had never conceived of before. She wore upon her head a preposterously tall bonnet, or at least a towering structure that seemed to be intended to serve the purpose of a bonnet. It reminded him—except for its shininess and newness—of the hood of the calash; indeed, it may have suggested itself vaguely to his memory that his grandmother had worn a piece of head-gear something similar, though not so shapely, which in very truth was nicknamed a "calash" from this obvious resemblance. The lady's shapely and generously feminine figure was closely drawn into a waist of shining black satin, cut down in a V on the neck, before and behind, and ornamented with very large sleeves of a strange pattern. But her skirts—for they were voluminous beyond numeration—were the wonder of her attire. Within fold after fold they swathed a foamy mystery of innumerable gauzy white underpinnings. As Mr. Pett's abashed eye traveled down this marvel of costume it landed upon a pair of black stockings,

the feet of which appeared to be balanced somewhat uncertainly in black satin slippers with queer high heels.

“Reuben Pett,” said the lady suddenly and with decision, “don’t you say nothing! If you knew how them shoes was pinching me, you’d know what I was goin’ through.”

Mr. Pett had to lean up against the door-post before recovering himself.

“Why, Samantha!” he said at last; “seems to me like you *had* gone through more or less.”

Here Mrs. Spaulding reached out in an irritation that carried her beyond all speech, and boxed Mr. Pett’s ears. Then she drew back, startled at her own act, but even more surprised at Mr. Pett’s reception of it. He was neither surprised nor disconcerted. He leaned back against the door-post and gazed on unperturbed.

“My!” he said; “Samantha, be them that play-actresses’ clo’es?”

Mrs. Spaulding nodded grimly.

“Well, all I’ve got to say, Samantha,” remarked Reuben Pett, as he straightened himself up and started out to bring their chariot to the door; “all I’ve got to say, and all I want to say, is that she must be a mighty fine figure of a woman, and that you’re busting her seams.”

Down the old dusty road the old calash jiggled and juggled, “weaving” most of the way in easy tacks down the sharp declivities. On the front seat—or, rather, on the upholstered bar—sat Reuben Pett, squirming uncomfortably, and

every now and then trying to sit side-saddle fashion for the sake of easier converse with his fair passenger. Mrs. Spaulding occupied the back seat, lifted high above her driver by the tilt of the curious vehicle, which also served to make the white foundation of her costume particularly visible, so that there were certain jolting moments when she suggested a black-robed Venus rising from a snowy foam-crest. At such moments Mr. Pett lost control of his horse to such an extent that the animal actually danced and fairly turned his long neck around as though it were set on a pivot. When such a crisis was reached, Mrs. Spaulding would utter a shrill and startling "hi!" which would cause the horse to stop suddenly, hurling Mr. Pett forward with such force that he would have to grab his narrow perch to save his neck, and for the next hundred yards or so of descent his attention would be wholly concentrated upon his duties as driver—for the horse insisted upon waltzing at the slightest shock to his nerves.

Mr. Pett's tendency to turn around and stare should not be laid up against him. For twenty years he had seen his neighbor, Mrs. Samantha Spaulding, once, at least; perhaps twice or thrice; mayhap even six or seven times a week; and yet, on this occasion, he had fair excuse for looking over his shoulder now and then to assure himself that the fair passenger at whose feet he—literally—sat, was indeed that very Samantha of his twenty years' knowledge. How

was he, who was only a man, and no ladies' man at that, to understand that the local dress-maker and the local habit of wearing wrinkly black alpaca and bombazine were to blame for his never having known that his next door neighbor had a superb bust and a gracious waist? How was he to know that the blindness of his own eyes was alone accountable for his ignorance of the whiteness of her teeth, and the shapeliness of the arms that peeped from the big, old-fashioned sleeves? Samantha's especial care upon her farm was her well-appointed dairy, and it is well known that to some women work in the spring-house imparts a delicate creaminess of complexion; but he was no close observer, and how was he to know that that was the reason why the little V in the front of Samantha's black satin bodice melted so softly into the fresh bright tint of her neck and chin? How, indeed, was a man who had no better opportunities than Reuben Pett had enjoyed, to understand that the pretty skirt-dancer dress, a dainty, fanciful travesty of an old-time fashion, had only revealed and not created an attractive and charming woman in his life-long friend and neighbor?

Samantha was not thinking in the least of herself. She had accepted her costume as something which she had no choice but to assume in the exercise of an imperative duty. She wore it for conscience sake only, just as any other New England martyr to her New Eng-

land convictions of right might have worn a mealsack or a suit of armor had circumstances imposed such a necessity.

But when Reuben Pett had looked around three or four times, she grasped her skirts in both hands and pushed them angrily down to their utmost length. Then, with a true woman's dislike of outraging pretty dress material, she made a furtive experiment or two to see if her skirts would not answer all the purposes of modesty without hanging wrong. Perhaps she had a natural talent that way; at any rate, she found that they would.

"Samantha," said Reuben Pett, over his shoulder, "what under the sun sense be there in chasin' them two young fools up? If they want to marry, why not let 'em marry? It's natural for 'em to want to, and it's agin nature to stop 'em. Maybe it wouldn't be sech a bad marriage, after all. Now you look at it in the light of conscience—"

"*You're* a nice hand to be advocating marriage, Reuben Pett," said Mrs. Spaulding; "you jest hurry up that horse and I'll look out for the light of conscience."

Mr. Pett chirruped to the capering ewe-neck, and they jolted downward in silence for half a mile. Then he said suddenly, as if emerging from a cloud of reflection:

"I ain't never said nothing agin marriage!"

Noon-time came, and the hot August sun

poured down upon them, until the old calash felt, as Mr. Pett remarked, like a chariot of fire. This observation was evolved in a humorous way to slacken the tension of a situation which was becoming distinctly unpleasant. Moved by a spirit of genial and broadly human benevolence which was somewhat unnatural to him, Mr. Pett had insisted upon pleading the cause of the youthful runaways with an insistence that was at once indiscreet and futile. In the end his companion had ordered him to hold his tongue, an injunction he was quite incapable of obeying. After a series of failures in the way of conversational starters, he finally scored a success by suggesting that they should pause and partake of the meagre refectio which Canada Pete had furnished them—a modest repast of doughnuts, apples and store pie. This they ate at the first creek where they found a convenient place to water the horse.

When they resumed their journey, they found that they were all refreshed and in brighter mood. Even the horse was intoxicated by the water and that form of verdure which may pass for grass on the margin of a mountain highway in Maine.

This change of feeling was also perceptible in the manner and bearing of the human beings who made up the cavalcade. Samantha adjusted her furbelows with unconscious deftness and daintiness, while she gazed before her into the bright blue heaven; and, I am sorry to say,

sucked her teeth. Reuben frankly flung one leg over the end of his seat, and conversed easily as he drove along, poised like a boy who rides a bare-back horse to water. After awhile he even felt emboldened to resume the forbidden theme of conversation.

"Nature is nature, Samantha," he said.

"'Tis in some folks," responded Samantha, dryly; "there's others seems to be able to git along without it." And Reuben turned this speech over in his mind for a good ten minutes.

Then, just as he was evidently about to say something, he glanced up and saw a sight which changed the current of his reflections. It was only a cloud in the heavens, but it evidently awakened a new idea in his mind.

"Samantha," he said, in a tone of voice that seemed inappropriately cheerful; "they's goin' to be a thunder storm."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Spaulding.

"Certain," asseverated Mr. Pett; "there she is a-comin' up, right agin the wind."

A thunder storm on the edge of a Maine forest is not wholly a joke. It sometimes has a way of playing with the forest trees much as a table d'hôte diner plays with the wooden tooth-picks. Samantha's protests, when Mr. Pett stated that he was going to get under the cover of an abandoned saw-mill which stood by the roadside a little way ahead of them, were more a matter of form than anything else. But still, when they reached the rough shed of unpainted and weather-

beaten boards, and Mr. Pett, in turning in gave the vehicle a sudden twist that broke the shaft, her anger at the delay thus rendered necessary was beyond her control.

“I declare to goodness, Reuben Pett,” she cried; “if you ain’t the awkwardest! Anybody’d a’most think you’d done that a purpose.”

“Oh, no, Samantha!” said Reuben Pett, pleasantly; “it ain’t right to talk like that. This here machine’s dreadful old. Why, Samantha, we’d ought to sympathize with it—you and me!”

“Speak for yourself, Mr. Pett,” said Samantha. “I ain’t so dreadful old, whatever you may be.”

At the moment Mr. Pett made no rejoinder to this. He unshipped the merry horse, and tied him to a post under the old saw-mill, and then he pulled the calash up the runway into the first story, and patiently set about the difficult task of mending the broken shaft, while Samantha, looking out through the broad, open doorway, watched the fierce Summer storm descend upon the land; and she tapped her impatient foot until it almost burst its too narrow satin covering.

“No, Samantha,” Mr. Pett said, at last, intently at work upon his splicing; “you ain’t so dreadful old, for a fact; but I’ve knowed you when you was a dreadful sight younger. I’ve knowed you,” he continued, reflectively, “when you was the spryest girl in ten miles round—

when you could dance as lively as that young lady whose clo'es you're a-wearin'."

"Don't you dare to talk to me about that jade!" said Mrs. Spaulding, snappishly.

"Why, no! certainly not!" said Mr. Pett; "I didn't mean no comparison. Only, as I was a-say-in', there was a time, Samantha, when you could dance."

"And who says I can't dance now?" demanded Mrs. Spaulding, with anger in her voice.

"My! I remember wunst," said Mr. Pett; and then the sense of Samantha's angry question seemed to penetrate his wandering mind.

"'Dance now?' " he repeated. "Sho! Samantha, you couldn't dance nowadays if you was to try."

"Who says I couldn't?" asked Samantha, again, with a set look developing around the corners of her mouth.

"I say you couldn't," replied Mr. Pett, obtusely. "'Tain't in nature. But there was a time, Samantha, when you was great on fancy steps."

"Think I'm too old for fancy steps now, do you?" She looked at her tormentor savagely, out of the corners of her eyes.

"Well, not too old, may be, Samantha," went on Mr. Pett; "but may be you ain't that limber you was. I know how it is. I ain't smart as I used to be, myself. Why, do you remember that night down at the Corners, when we two was the only ones that could jump over Squire Tate's

high andirons and cut a pigeon-wing before we come down?”

Mr. Pett appeared to be entirely unconscious that Mrs. Spaulding's bosom was heaving, that her eyes were snapping angrily, and that her foot was beating on the floor in that tattoo with which a woman announces that she is near an end of her patience.

“How high was them andirons?” she asked, breathlessly.

“Oh, I don't know,” answered Reuben, indifferently. He kept his eyes fixed on his work; but while he worked his splice closer with his right hand, with his left he took off his hat and held it out rather more than two feet above the floor.

“'Bout as high as that, may be,” he said. “Remember the tune we done that to? Went some sort of way like this, didn't it?” And with that remarkable force of talent which is only developed in country solitudes, Mr. Pett began to whistle an old-time air, a jiggetty, wiggetty, whirl-around strain born of some dead darkey's sea-sawing fiddle-bow, with a volume of sustained sound that would have put to shame anything the saw-mill could have done for itself in its buzzingest days.

“Whee-ee-ee, ee-ee, ee ee ee, whee, ee, ee, ee ee!” whistled Mr. Pett; and then, softly, and as if only the dim stirring of memory moved him, he began to call the old figures of the old dance.

“Forward all!” he crooned. “Turn partners!

Sashay! Alleman' all! Whee-ee-ee, ee-ee, ee ee, ee ee ee, whee, ee, ee, ee, ee ee!"

And suddenly, like the tiger leaping from her lair, the soft pattering and shuffling of feet behind him resolved itself into a quick, furious, rhythmic beat, and Samantha Spaulding shot high into the air, holding up her skirts with both hands, while her neat ankles crossed each other in a marvelous complication of agility a good twelve inches above his outstretched hat.

"There!" she cried, as she landed with a flourish that combined skill and grace; "there's what I done with you, and much I think of it! If you want to see dancin' that is dancin' look here. Here's what I did with Ben Griggs at the shuckin' that same year; and you wa'n't there, and good reason why!"

And then and there, while Reuben Pett's great rasping whistle rang through the old saw-mill, shrilling above the roar of the storm outside, Mrs. Samantha Spaulding executed with lightning rapidity and with the precision of perfect and confident knowledge, a dancing-step which for scientific complexity and daring originality had been twenty years before the surprise, the delight, the tingling, shocking, tempting nine-days'-wonder of the country-side.

"Whee-ee-ee, ee-ee, ee ee, ee ee ee, whee, ee, ee ee, ee ee!" Reuben Pett's whistle died away from sheer lack of breath as Samantha came to the end of her dance.

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There is nothing that hath a more heavy and leaden cold than a chilled enthusiasm. When the storm was over, although a laughing light played over the landscape; although diamond sparkles lit up the grateful white mist that rose from the refreshed earth; although the sun shone as though he had been expecting that thunder storm all day, and was inexpressibly glad that it was over and done with, Samantha leaned back in her seat in the calash, and nursed a cheerless bitterness of spirit—such a bitterness as is known only to the New England woman to whom has come a realization of the fact that she has made a fool of herself. Samantha Spaulding. Made a fool of herself. At her age. After twenty years of respectable widowhood. Her, of all folks. And with that old fool. Who'd be'n a-settin' and a-settin' and a-settin' all these years. And never said Boo! And now for him to twist her round his finger like that. She felt like—well, she didn't know how she *did* feel.

She was so long wrapped up in her own thoughts that it was with a start that she awoke to the fact that they were making very slow progress, and that this was due to the very peculiar conduct of Mr. Pett. He was making little or no effort to urge the horse along, and the horse, consequently, having got tired of wasting his bright spirits on the empty air, was maundering. So was Mr. Pett, in another way. He mumbled to himself; from time to time he whistled scraps of old-fashioned tunes, and occasionally he sang

to himself a brief catch—the catch coming in about the third or fourth bar.

"Look here, Reuben Pett!" demanded Samantha, shrilly; "be you going to get to Byram's Pond to-night?"

"I *kin*," replied Reuben.

"Well, *be* you?" Samantha Spaulding inquired.

"I d'no. Fact is, I wa'n't figurin' on that just now."

"Well, what *was* you figurin' on?" snapped Mrs. Spaulding.

"When you's goin' to marry me," Mr. Pett answered with perfect composure. "Look here, Samantha! it's this way: here's twenty years you've kept me waitin'."

"*Me* kept you waitin'! Well, Reuben Pett, if I ever!"

"Don't arguefy, Samantha; don't arguefy," remonstrated Mr. Pett; "I ain't rakin' up no details. What we've got to deal with is this question as it stands to-day. Be you a-goin' to marry me or be you not? And if you be, when be you?"

"Reuben Pett," exclaimed Samantha, with a showing of severity which was very creditable under the circumstances; "ain't you *ashamed* of talk like that between folks of our age?"

"*We* ain't no age—no age in particular, Samantha," said Mr. Pett. "A woman who can cut a pigeon-wing over a hat held up higher than any two pair of andirons that I ever see is young

enough for me, anyway.” And he chuckled over his successful duplicity.

Samantha blushed a red that was none the less becoming for a tinge of russet. Then she took a leaf out of Mr. Pett’s book.

“Young enough for you?” she repeated. “Well, I guess so! I wa’n’t thinkin’ of myself when I said old, Mr. Pett. I was thinkin’ of folks who was gettin’ most too old to drive down hill in a hurry.”

“Who’s that?” asked Reuben.

“I ain’t namin’ any names,” said Samantha; “but I’ve knowed the time when you wasn’t so awful afraid of gettin’ a spill off the front seat of a calash. Lord! how time does take the tuck out of some folks!” she concluded, addressing vacancy.

“Do you mean to say that I da’sn’t drive you down to Byram’s Pond to-night?” Mr. Pett inquired defiantly.

“I don’t know anything about it,” said Mrs. Spaulding.

Mr. Pett stuck a crooked forefinger into his lady-love’s face, and gazed at her with such an intensity that she was obliged at last to return his penetrating gaze.

“If I get you to Byram’s Pond before the train goes, will you marry me the first meetin’ house we come to?”

“I will,” said Mrs. Spaulding, after a moment’s hesitation, well remembering what the other party to the bargain had forgotten, that there was no

church in Byram Pond, nor nearer than forty miles down the railroad.

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In the warm dusk of a Summer's evening, a limping, shackle-gaited, bewildered horse, dragging a calash in the last stages of ruin, brought two travelers into the village of Byram's Pond. Far up on the hills there lingered yet the clouds of dust that marked where that calash had come down those hills at a pace whereat no calash ever came down hill before. Dust covered the two travelers so thickly, that, although the woman's costume was of peculiar and striking construction, its eccentricities were lost in a dull and uniform grayness. Her bonnet, however, would have excited comment. It had apparently been of remarkable height; but pounding against the hood of the calash had so knocked it out of all semblance to its original shape, that with its great wire hoops sticking out "four ways for Sunday," it looked more like a discarded crinoline perched upon her head than any known form of feminine bonnet.

The calash slowed up as it drew near the town. Suddenly it stopped short, and both the travelers gazed with startled interest at a capacious white tent reared by the roadside. From within this tent came the strains of a straining melodeon. Over the portal was stretched a canvas sign:

GOSPEL TENT OF REV. J. HANKEY.

As the travelers stared with all their eyes, they saw the flap of the tent thrown back, and four figures came out. There were two ladies, a stout, middle-aged lady, a shapely, buxom young lady, a tall, broad-shouldered young man, and the fourth figure was unmistakably a Minister of one of the Congregational denominations. The young man and the two ladies walked down the road a little way, and, entering a solid-looking farm wagon, drove off behind a pair of plump horses, in the direction of the railroad station, while the minister waved them a farewell that was also a benediction.

“Git down, Samantha!” said Reuben Pett, “and straighten out that bonnet of yours. Parson’s got another job before prayer-meetin’ begins.”

MY DEAR MRS. BILLINGTON

MISS CARMELITA BILLINGTON sat in a bent-wood rocking-chair in an upper room of a great hotel by the sea, and cried for a little space, and then for a little space dabbed at her hot cheeks and red eyes with a handkerchief wet with cologne; and dabbed and cried, and dabbed and cried, without seeming to get any "forwarder." The sun and the fresh breeze and the smell of the sea came in through her open windows, but she heeded them not. She mopped herself with cologne till she felt as if she could never again bear to have that honest scent near her dainty nose; but between the mops the tears trickled and trickled and trickled; and she was dreadfully afraid that inwardly, into the surprising great big cavity that had suddenly found room for itself in her poor little heart, the tears would trickle, trickle, trickle forever. It was no use telling herself she had done right. When you have done right and wish you hadn't had to you can't help having a profound contempt for the right. The right is respectable, of course, and proper and commendable and—in short, it's the right;—but, oh! what a nuisance it is! You can't help wondering in your private

mind why the right is so disagreeable and unpleasant and unsatisfactory, and the wrong so extremely nice. Of course, it was right to refuse Jack Hatterly; but why, why on earth couldn't it just as easily have been right to accept him? And the more she thought about it the more she doubted whether it was always quite right to do right, and whether it was not sometimes entirely wrong not to do wrong.

No; it was no use telling herself to be a brave girl. She was a brave girl and she knew it. In the face of the heartless world she could bear herself as jauntily as if she were heartless, too; but in the privacy of her own room, with Mama fast asleep on the verandah below, she could not see the slightest use in humbugging herself. She was perfectly miserable, and the rest of her reflections might have been summed up in the simple phrase of early girlhood, "So there!"

It was no consolation to poor Carmelita's feelings that her little private tragedy was of a most business-like, commonplace, unromantic complexion. It only made her more disgusted with herself for having made up her mind to do the right thing. She was not torn from her chosen love by the hands of cruel parents. Her parents had never denied her anything in her life, and if she had really wanted to wed a bankrupt bashaw with three tails and an elephant's head, she could have had her will. Nor did picturesque poverty have anything to do with the situation. She was rich and so was Jack. Nor could she

rail against a parental code of morality too stern for tender hearts. There was not the least atom of objection to Jack in any respect. He was absolutely as nice as could be—and, unless I am greatly misinformed, a good-looking young man, deeply in love, can be very nice indeed.

And yet there was no doubt in Carmelita's mind that it was her plain duty to refuse Jack. To marry him would mean to utterly give up and throw aside a plan of life, which, from her earliest childhood, she had never imagined to be capable of the smallest essential alteration. If a man who had devoted his whole mind and soul to the business of manufacturing overshoes were suddenly invited to become a salaried poet on a popular magazine, he could not regard the proposed change of profession as more preposterously impossible than the idea of marriage with Jack Hatterly seemed to Miss Carmelita Billington.

For Miss Billington occupied a peculiar position. She was the Diana of a small but highly prosperous city in the South-West; a city which her father had built up in years of enterprising toil. To mention the town of Los Brazos to any capitalist in the land was to call up the name of Billington, the brilliant speculator who, ruined on the Boston stock-market, went to Texas and absolutely created a town which for wealth, beauty and social distinction had not its equal in the great South-West. It was colonized with college graduates from New York, Boston and

Philadelphia; and, in Los Brazos, boys who had left cane-rushes and campus choruses scarce ten years behind them had fortunes in the hundred thousands, and stood high in public places. As the daughter of the founder of Los Brazos, Miss Billington's fortunes were allied, she could not but feel, to the place of her birth. There must she marry, there must she continue the social leadership which her mother was only too ready to lay down. The Mayor of the town, the District Attorney, the Supreme Court Judge and the Bishop were all among her many suitors; and six months before she had wished, being a natural-born sport, if she *was* a girl, that they would only get together and shake dice to see which of them should have her. But then she hadn't come East and met Jack Hatterly.

She thought of the first day she had seen the Atlantic Ocean and Jack, and she wished now that she had never been seized with the fancy to gaze on the great water. And yet, what a glorious day that was! How grand she had thought the ocean! And how grand she had thought Jack! And now she had given him up forever, that model of manly beauty and audacity; Jack with his jokes and his deviltries and his exhaustless capacity for ever new and original larks. Was it absolutely needful? Her poor little soul had to answer itself that it was. To leave Los Brazos and the great house with the cool quiet court-yard and the broad verandahs, and to live in crowded, noisy New York, where she knew

not a soul except Jack—to be separated from those two good fairies who lived only to gratify her slightest wish—to “go back” on Los Brazos, the pride of the Billingtons—no; it was impossible, impossible! She must stick to her post and make her choice between the Mayor and the Judge and the District Attorney and the Bishop. But how dull and serious and business-like they all seemed to her now that she had known Jack Hatterly, the first man she had ever met with a well-developed sense of humor!

What made it hardest for poor Carmelita was, perhaps, that fate had played her cruel pranks ever since the terrible moment of her act of renunciation. Thirty-six hours before, at the end of the dance in the great hotel parlors, Jack had proposed to her. For many days she had known what was coming, and what her answer must be, and she had given him no chance to see her alone. But Jack was Jack, and he had made his opportunity for himself, and had said his say under cover of the confusion at the end of the dance; and she had promised to give him his answer later, and she had given it, after a sleepless and tearful night; just a line to say that it could never, never be, and that he must not ask her again. And it had been done in such a commonplace, unromantic way that she hated to think of it—the meagre, insufficient little note handed to her maid to drop in the common letter-box of the hotel, and to lie there among bills and circulars and all sorts of silly every-day correspondence,

until the hotel-clerk should take it out and put it in Jack's box. She had passed through the office a little later, and her heart had sunk within her as she saw his morning's mail waiting for him in its pigeon-hole, and thought what the opening of it would bring to him.

But this was the least of her woe. Later came the fishing trip on the crowded cat-boat. She had fondly hoped that he would have the delicacy to excuse himself from that party of pleasure; but no, he was there, and doing just as she had asked him to, treating her as if nothing had happened, which was certainly the most exasperating thing he could have done. And then, to crown it all, they had been caught in a storm; and had not only been put in serious danger, which Carmelita did not mind at all, but had been tossed about until they were sore, and drenched with water, and driven into the stuffy little hole that was called a cabin, to choke and swelter and bump about in nauseated misery for two mortal hours, with the spray driving in through the gaping hatches; a dozen of them in all, packed together in there in the ill-smelling darkness. And so it was no wonder that, after a second night of utter misery, Miss Carmelita Billington felt so low in her nerves that she was quite unable to withhold her tears as she sat alone and thought of what lay behind her and before her.

She had been sitting alone a long time when she heard her mother come up the stairs and enter her own room. Mrs. Billington was as stout

as she was good-natured, and her step was not that of a light-weight. An irresistible desire came to the girl to go to her and pour out her grief, with her head pillowed on that broad and kindly bosom. She started up and hurried into the little parlor that separated her room from her mother's. As she entered the room at one door, Mr. Jack Hatterly entered through the door opening into the corridor. Then Carmelita lost her breath in wonderment, anger and dismay, for Mr. Jack Hatterly put his arm around her waist, kissed her in a somewhat casual manner, and then the door of her mother's room opened and her mother appeared; and instead of rebuking such extraordinary conduct, assisted Mr. Hatterly in gently thrusting her into the chamber of the elder lady with the kind of caressing but steering push with which a child is dismissed when grown-ups wish to talk privately.

"Stay in there, my dear, for the present; Mr. Hatterly and I have something to say to each other. I will call you later."

And before Carmelita fairly knew what had happened to her she found herself on the other side of the door, wondering exactly where insanity had broken out in the Billington family.

It took the astonished Miss Billington a couple of seconds to pull herself together, and then she seized the handle of the door with the full intention of walking indignantly into the parlor and demanding an explanation. But she had hardly got the door open by the merest crack

when the discourse of Mr. John Hatterly paralyzed her as thoroughly as had his previous actions.

"My dear Mrs. Billington," he was saying, in what Carmelita always called his "florid" voice, "I thoroughly understand your position, and I know the nature of the ties that bind Carmelita to her father's home. Had I known of them earlier, I might have avoided an association that could only have one ending for me. But it is not for myself that I speak now. Perhaps I have been unwise, and even wrong; but what is done is done, and I know now that she loves me as she could love no other man."

"Good gracious!" said Carmelita to herself, behind the door; "how does he know that?"

"Is it not possible, Mr. Hatterly, that there is some misunderstanding?" asked Mrs. Billington.

"My dear Mrs. Billington," said Jack, impressively; "there is no possible misunderstanding. She told me so herself."

Carmelita opened her eyes and her mouth, and stood as one petrified.

"Well, if I ever—!" was all that she whispered to herself, in the obscurity of her mother's room. She had addressed just seven words to Jack Hatterly on the fishing trip, and five of these were "Apple pie, if you please;" and the other two, uttered later, were "Not very."

"But, Mr. Hatterly," persisted Mrs. Billington, "when did you receive this assurance of my

daughter's feelings? You tell me that you spoke to her on this subject only the night before last, and I am sure she has hardly been out of my sight since."

"Yesterday," said Jack, in his calmest and most assured tone; "on the boat, coming home, during the squall."

MISS BILLINGTON (*behind the door, aside*).—"The shameless wretch! Why, he doesn't seem even to *know* that he's lying!"

"But, Mr. Hatterly," exclaimed Mrs. Billington; "during the squall we were all in the cabin, and you were outside, steering!"

"Certainly," said Jack.

"Then—excuse me, Mr. Hatterly—but how could my daughter have conveyed any such intelligence to you?"

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before*).—"What is the man going to say now? He must be perfectly crazy!"

Mr. Hatterly was calm and imperturbed.

"My dear Mrs. Billington," he responded, "you may or may not have observed a small heart-shaped aperture in each door or hatch of the cabin, exactly opposite the steersman's seat. It was through one of these apertures that your daughter communicated with me. Very appropriate shape, I must say, although their purpose is simply that of ventilation."

"It was very little ventilation we had in that awful place, Mr. Hatterly!" interjected Mrs. Billington, remembering those hours of horror.

"Very little, indeed, my dear Mrs. Billington," replied Mr. Hatterly, in an apologetic tone; "and I am afraid your daughter and I, between us, were responsible for some of your discomfort. She had her hand through the port ventilator about half the time."

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before*).—"I wonder the man isn't struck dead, sitting there! Of all the wicked, heartless falsehoods I ever heard—!"

"And may I ask, Mr. Hatterly," inquired Mrs. Billington, "what my daughter's hand was doing through the ventilator?"

"Pressing mine, God bless her!" responded Mr. Hatterly, unabashed.

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but conscious of a sudden, hideous chill*).—"Good heavens! the man can't be lying; he's simply mistaken."

"I see, my dear Mrs. Billington," said Mr. Hatterly, "that I shall have to be perfectly frank with you. Such passages are not often repeated, especially to a parent; but under the circumstances I think you will admit that I have no other guarantee of my good faith to give you. I have no doubt that if you were to ask your daughter at this minute about her feelings, she would think she ought to sacrifice her affection to the duty that she thinks is laid out for her in a distant life. Did I feel that she could ever have any happiness in following that path, believe me, I should be the last to try to win her from it, no matter what might be my own loneliness and misery. But after what she confided to me in

that awful hour of peril, where, in the presence of imminent death, it was impossible for her to conceal or repress the deepest feelings of her heart, I should be doing an injustice to her as well as to myself, and even to you, my dear Mrs. Billington—for I know how sincerely you wish her happiness—if I were to let any false delicacy keep me from telling you what she said to me.” Jack Hatterly could talk when he got going.

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but hot, not cold*).—“Now, I am going to know which one of those girls was talking to him, if I have to stay here all day.”

It was with a quavering voice that Mrs. Billington said:

“Under the circumstances, Mr. Hatterly, I think you might tell me all she said—all—all—”

Here Mrs. Billington drew herself up and spoke with a certain dignity. “I should explain to you, Mr. Hatterly, that during the return trip I was not feeling entirely well, myself, and I probably was not as observant as I should have been under other circumstances.”

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, reflectively*).—“Poor Ma! She was so sick that she went to sleep with her head on my feet. I believe it was that Peterson girl who was nearest the port ventilator.”

Mr. Hatterly’s tone was effusively grateful. “I knew that I could rely upon your clear sense,

my dear Mrs. Billington," he said, "as well as upon your kindness of heart. Very well, then; the first thing I knew as I sat there alone, steering, almost blinded by the spray, Carmelita slipped her hand through the ventilator and caught mine in a pressure that went to my heart."

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but without stopping to reflect*).—"If I find out the girl that did that—"

Mr. Hatterly went on with warm gratitude in his voice: "And let me add, my dear Mrs. Billington, that every single time I luffed, that dear little hand came out and touched mine, to inspire me with strength and confidence."

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, with decision*).—"I'll cut her hand off!"

"And in the lulls of the storm," Mr. Hatterly continued, "she said to me what nothing but the extremity of the occasion would induce me to repeat, my dear Mrs. Billington; 'Jack,' she said, 'I am yours, I am all yours, and yours forever.'"

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but more so*).—"That wasn't the Peterson girl. That was Mamie Jackson, for I have known of her saying it twice before."

Mrs. Billington leaned back in her chair, and fanned herself with her handkerchief.

"Oh, Mr. Hatterly!" she cried.

Mr. Hatterly leaned forward and captured one of Mrs. Billington's hands, while she covered her eyes with the other.

"Call me Jack," he said.

"I—I'm afraid I shall have to," sobbed Mrs. Billington.

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, grimly*).—"Mamie Jackson's mother won't; I know *that!*"

"And then," Mr. Hatterly continued, "she said to me, 'Jack, I am glad of this fate. I can speak now as I never could have spoken before.'"

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but highly charged with electricity*).—"Now I want to know what she did say when she spoke."

Mr. Hatterly's clear and fluent voice continued to report the interesting conversation, while Mrs. Billington sobbed softly, and permitted her kind old hand to be fondled.

"'Jack,' she said," Mr. Hatterly went on, "'life might have separated us, but death unites us.'"

MISS BILLINGTON (*as before, but with clenched hands and set lips*).—"That is neither one of those girls. They haven't got the sand. Whoever it is, that settles it." She flung open the door and swept into the room.

"Jack," she said, "if I did talk any such ridiculous, absurd, contemptible, utterly despicable nonsense, I don't *choose* to have it repeated. Mama, dear, you know we *can* see a great deal of each other if you can only make Papa come and spend the Summer here by the sea, and we go down to Los Brazos for part of the Winter."

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That evening Miss Carmelita Billington asked

her Spanish maid if she had dropped the letter addressed to Mr. Hatterly in the letter-box. The Spanish maid went through a pleasing dramatic performance, in which she first assured her mistress that she *had*; then became aware of a sudden doubt; hunted through six or eight pockets which were not in her dress, and then produced the crumpled envelope unopened. She begged ten thousand pardons; she cursed herself and the day she was born, and her incapable memory; and expressed a willingness to drown herself, which might have been more terrifying had she ever before displayed any willingness to enter into intimate relations with water.

Miss Billington treated her with unusual indulgence.

"It's all right, Concha," she said; "it didn't matter in the least, only Mr. Hatterly told me that he had never received it, and so I thought I'd ask you."

Then, as the girl was leaving the room, Carmelita called her back, moved by a sudden impulse.

"Oh, Concha!" she said; "you wanted one of those shell breast-pins, didn't you? Here, take this and buy yourself one!" and she held out a dollar bill.

When she reached her own room, Concha put the dollar bill in a gayly-painted little box on top of a new five-dollar bill, and hid them both under her prayer-book.

"Women," she said, in her simple Spanish

way; "women are pigs. The gentleman, he gives me five dollars, only that I put the letter in my pocket; the lady, she gets the gentleman, and she gives me one dollar, and I hasten out of the room that she shall not take it back. Women—women are pigs!"

THE RUNAWAY BROWNS

A STORY OF SMALL STORIES



THE RUNAWAY BROWNS

PROLOGUE

(Because You Can't Begin a Story in Philadelphia.)

IT seems quite natural that the houses in Philadelphia should grow backward; yet a real Philadelphia house is always a surprise to the stranger. From the sidewalk you see what looks like a compressed mausoleum. You enter, wondering if there is going to be room for you and the one tier of defunct. Behold! that house spreads out into the silent hollow of the "square"; back-extension after back-extension, in holy privacy, in a dim and chastened respectability, you see a Philadelphia HOME expand itself.

For many, many years there came forth daily from the door of such a house as this a gentleman who was at first Oldish, then Old, then Very Old, indeed. He was thin and tall; he wore his old-fashioned beaver hat on one side of his gaunt, old-fashioned head; his clothes had been dandified once, when dandies wore stocks and tied their collars behind. He wore them still so jauntily as to make you think you were wrong in your reckoning—if the disloyal clothes hadn't gone threadbare and shiny.

A fragile, faded, prettyish, middle-aged wife said good-by to the Oldish man at the white door-step as he went forth, leaning on the arm of a thin, serious-looking young man; a fragile, fading, pretty young wife bade the Old man good-by at the same door-step as he went forth on the arm of the same young man, not quite so young now. When he was a Very Old man, neither wife bade him good-by, but a little yellow-haired boy walked on the other side of the Very Old man, while his right arm was supported by the young man, who was only young now by comparison.

He always walked as jauntily as each new year would let him, down the sunny side of Chestnut Street. All the old merchants knew him; all the solid, comfortable-looking old Friends nodded to him in a half-pitying, half-admiring way. If you asked one of them who he was, you would get this answer:

"Col. Brown, sir; Col. Orlando Brown—remarkable man, sir—great inventor—greatest mining expert in the country—made half a dozen fortunes—not worth a soumarkee—not worth a soumarkee, sir—too wild, sir—fanciful—excitable." Here the Philadelphia merchant would tap his head. "New York man originally." And *here* the Philadelphia merchant would shake his head.

But the Colonel cared neither for their admiration or their pity; he set his hat further on one side, pulled his stock up over his collar,

then pulled his collar up over his stock, ran his hand through his fine whiskers, and swaggered on his way to look at the mining-stock list.

In New York, the Colonel would have been neither quite so much of a wonder, nor quite so much of an impracticable. He was only one of the many geniuses with whom the times can not readily keep abreast. He would spend years in devising new systems of milling and smelting ores—splendid systems—only, as they were about ten years ahead of the needs of civilization, civilization could make no use of them. Consequently, the Colonel had to be “temporarily accommodated” until civilization caught up with him. When she did, the Colonel drew his pay, and promptly sunk it in getting up new and still more advanced systems which the world could not possibly use for a decade at least. Meanwhile the Colonel’s collars got frayed and his wives wore out.

He was like a swimmer who dives for the great seventh billow just as the fourth or fifth is rising, and comes up where he should have gone down. Thus he succeeded in keeping out of tune with the resistless surf of progress.

The Colonel died at last in the trough of the sea. When he died, he owned nothing but the roof that sheltered him and the patents that had ruined and should have enriched him.

Paul was the name of the curly-headed boy. Ernest was the name of the thin young man

who had grown old holding up his father's arms. All his days, from the day he left the University of Pennsylvania to the day he left this world, his prime function in life was that of a calculating machine for the Brown patents.

It was he who had figured into practical usefulness the creations of his father's mechanical genius, balancing economies of power and speed and efficiency, one against the other. Outside of this he lived solely for hygienic reasons.

The Colonel was dead, but the patents were alive.

Ernest rented the most of the old house to a boarding-house keeper, and went to live with Paul in the last of the back-extensions, where they had a gloomy workshop on the first floor. Three times a day they issued therefrom to take their meals at the boarding-house table, where scrapple set the key of greasiness at breakfast, well sustained at dinner, and ending in a delicate diminuendo with the doughnuts at supper.

They had also retained the little stable at the rear, and here they kept two saddle-horses which it was Paul's duty to care for, and on which they took, morning and evening, a silent, sanitary ride—for the air made Ernest cough. They had no friends and they went nowhere, save that they took tea every Sunday evening at their Aunt Chambray's, an elderly lady of Huguenot extraction, who kept a rapidly decaying boarding and day school for young ladies, that had once been fashionable. It was a solemn func-

tion, held in the second story front drawing-room. When anybody opened a door downstairs, a draught came up bearing a smell—or smells—from the school-room downstairs—a smell of ink, a smell of slates, a smell of luncheon boxes and the chicken-coopy flavor of small children that you can not get out of a school-room. There were thin bread-and-butter and macaroons and tea. There was Aunt Chambray, there were Cousins Zénobie, Zaire and Palmyre, thin, elegant, aristocratic and Roman-nosed; there was also a little third or fourth cousin, Adèle, who taught for her board, and who led a sad sort of life in the Chambray household, perhaps because she was plump and pretty and sweet-voiced, and because the way she went on with Paul was simply scandalous.

This was Paul Brown's life. Through their long working hours Ernest taught him all he had learned at college, and the whole science and mystery of the Brown patents. Paul sometimes looked from his bedroom window and wondered if the stars in their courses went about with tables of logarithms in their hands.

But the day came when the calculations of Ernest Brown, of infallible Science and of irresistible Nature, all worked themselves out together. Three things happened:

First, the great Brown process was perfected, just as a vast new market rose clamoring for it.

The Brown boys sold out to a New York syndicate and were rich.

Second, Ernest, having put his whole constitution into the Brown patents, lay down and calmly and placidly died.

Third, before his death he said to Paul, who was sitting by his bedside:

"Really, Paul, it is of extremely little consequence. Of course I am dying just as I have the means to indulge my tastes. But, do you know, it has lately occurred to me, on reflection, that I *have* no tastes. I think I have been in error in not cultivating some. Have *you* any tastes, Paul?"

Paul thought for a little while, then he said:

"I think I have a taste for Adèle."

The dying man looked mildly surprised. He pondered for a while.

"I think I should cultivate it," he said.

Then he turned his face to the wall.

In the Spring, Paul married Adèle.

I

THEIR honey-moon was a distinct failure. What could you expect of two young people who had hardly stirred, their lives long, out of two dull, dismal old Philadelphia houses, looking out on a crossing of alleyways for their world? They went, poor lambs, in their simple ignorance, to Long Branch, where the Hebrew hosts frightened them; to Niagara Falls, where they ran into an excursion of a Western Editorial Association; and to Saratoga, where they felt as if even Divine Providence had forgotten them. They had not the first idea of traveling; they missed connections; they scattered their baggage all along their line; they got the wrong tickets; and, being the most fully developed specimen of bridal couple that had appeared for some years, they afforded unbounded amusement and great pecuniary profit to countless train-hands, porters, waiters, bell-boys, chamber-maids and hack-drivers, for the space of two weeks. Then they reached New York, went to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, and lay awake all night long wondering when the rest of the town was going to bed. In the morning Paul said:

“I am going down to see Mr. Grinridge.”

"Oh, do!" said Adèle; "and *do* tell how *much* I'll thank him if he'll *only* tell us *what* to do and *where* to go! I really can't stand this another week longer. If we don't settle down *somewhere*—I'd—I'd rather go back to Philadelphia. And you know we said we'd *never* do that."

"No," said Paul, resolutely; "we won't go back to Philadelphia!" And he buttoned his coat up tight, kissed his little wife as she lay in the big hotel bed, nursing a nervous headache, and strode off to find Mr. Grinridge.

Mr. Grinridge had been the Syndicate's lawyer, and was now Paul's. He had conducted the negotiations with Ernest and Paul, and had once or twice taken Paul to lunch at the Savarin. And Mr. Grinridge was the only man in the great big world whom this poor child of a Philadelphia back-extension could call so much as an acquaintance.

Mr. Grinridge was a large, rosy, handsome, well-fed old gentleman, with beautiful curly gray hair and bright boyish eyes.

"Ah! I see," he said. "You have no friends in Philadelphia and you *have* relatives. No wonder you don't want to go back. H'm, let's see; how would New York suit you to live in?"

"Isn't it rather—noisy?" inquired Paul, dubiously.

"Oh, it strikes you so at first," said Mr. Grinridge; "but you soon get used to that. Besides, you know, you can get a quiet little flat."

Paul brightened up. He said he thought that sounded nice. So Mr. Grinridge sent a clerk with him to half a dozen agencies, where he amassed various slips of paper torn from stub-books. When he had quite a handful of these, he went back to Adèle.

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Three days later a yellow-haired young man, with a haggard face and a dazed look in his eyes, walked into Mr. Grinridge's office.

"Well, have you found your flat?" said Mr. Grinridge.

"I've found about all the flats in creation," said Paul Brown. "One more flat will drive me crazy!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Mr. Grinridge.

"Matter!" said Paul; "why, it's a nightmare. We've seen about half the flats in New York. We've done nothing but go up and down elevators and flights of stairs. We've seen every kind of a flat, I believe, that ever was invented. We've seen flats with kitchens in the front, and flats where you sleep in the dining-room and eat in the bedrooms. We've seen flats that you couldn't turn round in, and flats as big as all outdoors. And the more we've seen of the whole flat business, the more certain we are that we don't want to have anything to do with it. We'd rather go and live in a cage with the animals up in Central Park."

Mr. Grinridge laughed with twinkling eyes.

"I see, I see," he said; "you are not quite up to New York pitch yet. Well, what do you say to a nice little suburban cottage? There are plenty of places convenient to the city on Long Island, up the Hudson and over in Jersey. You can come in and go to the theatre when you want to, or you can stay at home and be quite quiet and Philadelphian. Why, now that I've grown old, I've come to that sort of thing myself. I've settled down in just such a little hole in the ground. Now, there's Pelham and Mt. Vernon and Yonkers and Hastings and Morristown and Englewood and Plainfield—what's the matter with one of those places?"

"What's the matter with the place where you are?" demanded Paul.

Mr. Grinridge laughed again.

"Nothing that I know of," said he. "If you and Mrs. Brown will lunch with me to-morrow, we'll run out early and take a look at it. I know of one house that ought to suit you."

They did lunch with Mr. Grinridge the next day. It was a delightful little luncheon, and Mr. Grinridge was so charmed with young Mrs. Brown that he could hardly tear himself away from the table in time to catch the early train. But they did catch it; and very soon they were rolling through that great broad sea of marsh which the Jersey folk call the "medders." Then they came to a land of low, rolling hills and undulating green fields, with patches of woodland

here and there, and the whole landscape peppered with little houses, many of them very bright and new-looking. Little towns were strung all along the railroad like beads on a string, and they had come to one of the prettiest of these, which peeped out of a nest of young green trees, when Mr. Grinridge said: "Here we are."

Mr. Grinridge's surrey was waiting at the station. It whirled them through a cluster of comfortable, old-fashioned houses with first stories of whitewashed stone; and then up into the new part of the town, where the houses were of wood, and quite clearly new—although they all tried very hard to look a great deal more antique than the real old ones. Suddenly they turned into a broad, cheerful street with great trees along the edge of the roadway, and with a row of low, spreading, sloping-roofed cottages on each side. Every house stood in a broad, generous patch of lawn or garden. At the further end of the street stood an old white church with a great pillared portico in front.

"Oh!" cried Adèle, in a tone that settled it.

"Rather nice, isn't it?" said Mr. Grinridge; "that's my house up next to the church, and here's yours down here—that is, if you like it."

The June roses were blooming in the front yard, the gravel walks were as neat as a new pin. Ampelopsis climbed over half the house, and there were scarlet-runners on the sunny side. Of course they liked it.

"It was built for the owner," said Mr. Grin-

ridge, "but he has never occupied it. I believe he's decided to settle in California. So nobody's ever lived in the house except the caretaker, although it's been built three years. By the way, she's a very excellent and capable old woman. She put out all those flowers and things. The place was as bare as the back of my hand when she took hold of it. I should think she might be able to 'do' for you till you got settled. Her name is Mrs. Wimple."

II

THE house was as delightful inside as out. Mrs. Wimple was a cheery, motherly old soul who could do everything that any mortal woman ever did, and who asked for no greater joy than to take a stray young married couple—or, for the matter of that, a dozen stray young married couples—under her protecting wings and “do” for them with maternal solicitude; the terms and everything else were satisfactory, and so there was nothing for the two young Browns to do but to furnish their new home and go to housekeeping.

Now this is, or ought to be, the most delightful of occupations for a young married couple. I have always been sorry for Adam and Eve that, in their first happy innocence, they started life in a ready furnished establishment. I suppose they had some fun naming the animals; but it was a poor substitute for the happiness of buying your own furniture.

But I am sorry to say the two young Browns did not enjoy this happiness any more than our first parents did, for a similar reason—they did not know enough. Home is an acquired taste. If you once acquire it, you will never want to do

without it. But if you never have acquired it—if you have never known what it is to have a Home—why, then, the furnishing forth of your new house means no more to you than the obligatory purchase of so many tables and chairs, and pots and pans; and you put no more sentiment into it than you do into buying a ton of hard coal or a pair of suspenders—and you lose one of the sweetest delights of human life.

That was the case of the young Browns.

It was tables and chairs to them, pots and pans; nothing more, nothing less. They bought a lot of very pretty things, and they put them around the house in perfectly proper places; but it never once occurred to them that there was any fun in it. Mrs. Wimple enjoyed it. She shoved the new furniture all about, and tried each thing in a dozen different spots; but no matter where she put it, the Browns were equally satisfied. They always said it would “do”; and, after awhile, Mrs. Wimple gave it up as a bad job. She *couldn't* get these young people interested in their home; and so she went off to her kitchen and did such wonders in the way of cookery that day after day slipped by and they never thought of going into the city and getting a stock of servants to supplant her. Why should they? Mrs. Wimple, all by herself, could have supplanted any stock of servants that was ever got together.

And yet, in spite of Mrs. Wimple and their lesser advantages, such as health and wealth,

and youth and love, and a pretty house and pretty things about them, and days of perfect Summer weather in that sweet and gracious hillside country, something of the dull disappointment of their honey-moon lingered about the life of these new-wed Browns.

For one thing, they were lonely—though they didn't know it. Strange as it may seem, their neighbors in the pretty little town followed a curious suburban fashion, and fled, at the approach of Summer, to noisy, crowded, comfortless hotels in what they called the "real country"—which is really the Country of Canned Vegetables. When the flowers in their gardens had given over blooming, they would come back; but just at present they were scattered over the face of the earth. And so nobody came to call on the new residents. Even Mr. Grinridge spent most of his time at Manhattan Beach.

But it was more than mere loneliness that troubled them. They hadn't the first idea, either of them, what to do with their lives. Paul began to understand, vaguely, what Ernest had meant by speaking of the necessity of cultivating tastes. He certainly was better off than Ernest had been, in that he had a taste for Adèle; but that taste appeared to be cultivated to its fullest extent, and still he seemed to have a good deal of time on his hands. And Adèle was in exactly the same plight. She loved Paul with her whole heart; but, as time passed on, she became more and more conscious of some facts that she had

often taught the children at Madame Chambray's, without thinking much of their significance, namely—that there were sixty minutes in an hour and twenty-four hours in a day.

At last they got to talking frankly about it. They made up their minds that they needed occupation; but what occupation? Traveling? No; they were quite agreed that they never wanted to see a hôtel again. Gardening? Bot-anizing? Music? Painting? Improvement of the Mind? They couldn't find that they had the faintest glimmer of taste for any one of these things. Finally they hit upon Reading—and the idea came to them with all the force of an original discovery.

Now, you must remember that these two young people had been brought up in the gloomy hollows of two highly respectable Philadelphia "squares"; that their young lives had been all work and no play, and that they knew about as much of books as they did of balloons. Of course, Adèle had read such fiction as Aunt Chambray had thought suitable for a young lady in her position, which was mostly of a religious but depressing cast; and Ernest, in the exercise of his educational duties, had put Paul through Shakspeare, Scott, Dickens and Thackeray, just as he had put him through Euclid and Algebra. But, as he had selected Paul's eleventh year for this course in English literature, Paul may be said to have bolted his literary diet without absorbing much of its vital essence. As to a

modern novel, neither of them knew what it was. So, when they thought about it, it became quite clear to their minds that they ought to get their literature up to date.

They did it, and the way they did it was this: Paul went to New York, to the book-stand in the ferry-house, and bought all the latest novels, on the recommendation of the newsdealer. They were mostly in blue and yellow paper covers, and cost from twenty-five to seventy-five cents a-piece, though several of them had board covers and cost a dollar. Paul bought something like seven dozen of these gems of literature, and the book-stand man looked dazed for the rest of the day.

Later on, it was Paul and Adèle who looked dazed. They spent their unoccupied time—which is to say, all the time when they were not eating or sleeping—in reading those books. Paul read them aloud and Adèle listened. The books lasted two weeks. They were two weeks of murder, suicide, assassination, burglary, arson, tiger-killing, lion-hunting, elephant-shooting, carnage, bloodshed, torture, embezzlement, heroism, sacrifice, agony, devotion, death, disease, mutilation, misery, vice, crime, love, glory, and everything else that goes to spice twenty-five-cent literature.

“My gracious!” said Adèle, when the last book, a bright pink one, had reeled to a gory close. “And we thought life was stupid!”

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Of course, they didn't believe it all; for it was too good to be true. But then, if you only believed the smallest part of it, what a world of sport and adventure, of fire and life it was, to charm these two children of Philadelphian respectability! And there certainly was some basis for it all.

In a spirit of scientific inquiry, Paul got hold of some New York papers—he had never read anything but Philadelphia journals before—and he caught a glimpse of life's liveliness that fairly astonished him.

"Why," he said to Adèle, "the simple fact is, it's all there; but we are not in it."

How to get in it? That was the question. Here, just outside their very gate, was a great world of action and event going on its entertaining way, while their life was as humdrum as an unbroken routine could make it. To-day, Mrs. Wimple gave them wheat-cakes for breakfast. To-morrow she gave them oat-meal. Both were excellent; and they had plenty of cream; but sometimes they thought they would have liked a little cold poison for a change.

They thought about it and they talked about it in the drowsy Summer afternoons and in the wakeful Summer evenings when you *couldn't* feel like going to sleep any more than the nameless insects that sawed and filed and buzzed and chirped in the dark depths of the foliage. And by-and-by the Plan was born.

"Why?" said Paul, as he stalked up and down

the dainty little sitting-room, his hands in his pockets and a scowl on his brow, "why does nothing ever happen to us? Because we're not where anything happens. We're not among the kind of people things happen to. We aren't acquainted with *anybody*, for the matter of that; but we never should get to know that sort of people, anyway. Fancy, Mr. Grinridge saying, 'Allow me to introduce you to my friend, Mr. Smith, who killed ninety-seven Zulus in one morning'; or, 'This is Mr. Jones, the celebrated duelist and murderer.' I tell you, Adèle, we're not in the right society for adventure!"

"But how are we to get into it, Paul, dear?" asked Adèle piteously.

"We've got to go after it," said Paul. "These people aren't coming to us. They must find us as stupid as we find ourselves." He picked up the morning paper. "Look here! 'A Drummer Elopes with an Heiress,' 'A Peddler Saves Three Children from Drowning,' 'Narrow Escape of a Lightning-rod Agent,' 'A Stage-Driver Kills a Robber,' 'Curious Adventure of a Commercial Traveler,' 'A Tramp's Lucky Piece of Pie.' There! those are the people who see life—the people who move around in the world and get among their fellow-men. Things happen to *them*."

"But, Paul," objected Adèle, "we can't be drummers and stage-drivers and tramps and all that. You wouldn't like that sort of thing, I am sure."

"What's the reason I can't?" cried Paul.
"Why can't I be a drummer?"

"Because you can't drum," said Adèle.

"That's it," said Paul, excitedly. "We live so much to ourselves that we don't know even our fellow-men. Why, you poor, dear child, a drummer is a commercial traveler! He drums up trade, don't you know?"

"But you haven't any trade to drum up, dear," said Adèle, dubiously.

"That's just what's the matter!" said Paul. "We've got a lot of money and an awfully respectable bringing-up, and a comfortable home and Mrs. Wimple and three meals a day, and nothing will ever happen to us till we die of dullness striking into a vital part. Now, suppose we hadn't got the money, and had to go out into the world. We might not have so good a time, all the time; but we'd have more different kinds of times than we're ever likely to have the way we're living now. And almost any different kind of a time would be a relief, wouldn't it, dear?"

"Paul," said Adèle, solemnly, laying down her embroidery pattern on which, for three weary weeks, she had tried to make herself believe she was working; "yesterday, do you know, I nearly fell down the front steps, and I thought I was going to sprain my ankle; and when I caught myself and didn't fall, I was really—Paul, it sounds wicked—but I was really almost sorry. It would have been *such* a change, don't you understand?"

"I do," said Paul. "Now, Adèle, you listen to me!"

And he sat down beside her and whispered in her ear.

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One week after that day, Mrs. Wimple, coming downstairs in the morning, found on the kitchen table, two letters, one addressed to her and one to Mr. Grinridge. Her letter told her simply that her employers had gone away and would not return for a year. She was to care for the house in all respects as if they were there. Mr. Grinridge would furnish her with money for her wages and current expenses, upon receipt of the letter addressed to him.

She went upstairs, and made the tour of all the rooms. Save for Mrs. Wimple, the house of the Browns was as empty and desolate as though it had never been the home of a happy young married couple.

It was just six o'clock in the morning, Mrs. Wimple heard the up-train choo-choo-ing off into the distance.

The Browns had run away.

III

“**H**AVE we forgotten anything?” asked Mrs. Brown of Mr. Brown, as they hurried, in a nervous, frightened way through the soft blue-gray mist of the Summer morning, making for the railroad station.

Paul Brown thought for a moment.

“I don’t think we have forgotten a solitary thing,” said he.

It would have been strange if they had. For one week they had done nothing but plan the details of their elopement. They had thought it all out, just as if it had been a novel of which they were to be the hero and heroine. For one year, one happy, free, irresponsible year, they were to drop out of their own private little world of respectability and dullness into that great outside world where things “happen” to people. For that year they had made every provision that could suggest itself to two youthful imaginations, stimulated by a diet of twenty-five and fifty-cent novels. Like the two little shy, secretive squirrels that they were, they had planned with a forethought that would have astonished people better skilled in the ways of the world. They had neglected nothing to insure absolute freedom and absolute privacy for twelve good months. They

had left no clue to their destination; for their destination was to be determined by chance. They were prepared for all possible contingencies which might call for the use of money, for Paul had picked out half a dozen country banks, conveniently situated in the Middle and New England States, in each of which he had made a deposit in the name of an imaginary Mr. Parkins, to be drawn against by an imaginary son of the imaginary Mr. Parkins, an invalid traveling for his health, for whom Paul had constructed a very natural-looking signature. And if, by chance, the daily papers got hold of the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Brown, the young Philadelphia millionaire, and his wife, there would be nothing to connect that sensation with the appearance of a gentleman calling himself Mr. Parkins, at the counter of the Lonetown and Stray Corners Bank, for the purpose of drawing a draft to meet his traveling expenses.

Yes, it was all very well thought out, and nothing had been forgotten; but after they had passed through the old town, with its comfortable whitewashed houses, all asleep, except for the just-opening morning-glories, and, mounting the embankment on which the station stood, looked back at the red chimney of their own house, just topping the young trees, there was a queer little feeling at the two hearts of the Runaway Browns that they did not understand at all; but which any one who had ever had a home could have told them was the first beginning of homesickness.

You see, in a certain sense, they *had* forgotten something.

But, as the six o'clock train came up, they got on it, and it went choo-choo-ing off with them, and they had no idea that what was troubling them internally was anything more than the natural result of starting off without breakfast.

They had procured tickets for the Junction, where the main line crossed their little branch road and led off into the great wide world. They reached the Junction at seven o'clock, and took their first taste of the fare of the adventurous. In a small, dark, dirty eating-house, opposite the station, each of the Browns consumed two musty eggs, a slab of dead oatmeal and a saleratus-infected biscuit, and drank a cup of something which tasted brown and called itself coffee.

"Well, we ate it," said Paul, when they came out.

"Yes, dear," said Adèle; "and it seems to me that we ate a good deal of smell, too."

They bought no tickets at the Junction. They had decided to take the first train going north, and to pay their fare to the first station at which it would stop outside of the state. But the first train north did not seem to be in a hurry to come along; and so they walked up and down the platform and looked at the other people.

"Paul," said Adèle, suddenly, in a hurried whisper, "I think we've found them."

"Found whom, dear?" inquired her startled husband.

"The people things happen to," whispered Adèle.

She pointed to a group of nine persons huddled together at the extreme end of the platform. They certainly did look, not only like people to whom things might happen, in general, but like people to whom something in particular had very recently happened—something in the nature of a moral earthquake, for instance. They all wore expressions of discontent and perplexity, except one, a tall, lank, active man with an enormous black moustache, who seemed to be talking to the other eight in an encouraging, hopeful, vehement sort of way which produced absolutely no impression upon any one of them. The tall man was the sort of man that one would naturally take—or avoid—for a particularly pushing specimen of lightning-rod agent or tree-peddler; but the personal appearance of his companions puzzled the Browns as much as it interested them. There were four ladies and four gentlemen. The gentlemen were all clean-shaven—so clean shaven that their four chins were positively blue. They were a fat middle-aged man, a slim young man, a man who looked as if he might be thirty, and a long gaunt man with an extremely prominent nose, set slightly askew in a face that was curiously crooked, and yet curiously agreeable. No human being could have guessed this last man's age within ten years. Of the ladies, one was stout and mature; of the other three, two were comparatively and one positively young, and all decidedly

good-looking. In fact, the youngest one, who wore her curly hair quite short, was a very pretty girl.

The clothes of these eight people were calculated to attract attention. They were both light and loud. In the matter of trousers the men were particularly unconventional, and the hats of the ladies astonished Adèle. But even had they worn the quietest of clothes, there was something about those people that, in a strange indescribable way, set them apart from their fellow-creatures. It was not only the men's blue chins; it was not that the hair of all the four ladies had a singularly unlife-like appearance, like the tow wigs that dolls wear; nor was it even that they all had an odd dryness and dullness of complexion that made one think of wax fruit in certain stages of deterioration—it was not one of these things, it was not all of them; but it was something which seemed to express itself in their whole bearing and carriage, as if a curious sort of self-consciousness was coming out like a rash all over them.

“Did you ever see real actors off the stage?” asked Adèle, under her breath.

“No,” said Paul; “but I should think those people must be actors. If they aren't, what else can they be?”

“We might walk up and down the platform,” said Adèle, slipping her hand into Paul's arm.

They both of them felt a funny little thrill of half-guilty, half-delightful excitement. It was simply human nature. There is no human being

born without the longing to "get behind the scenes": to see the actor in his daily life: to know the real side of that queer world of unreality. Those who have been there are generally very willing to testify that the people who sit in front of the curtain get the most for their money, but nobody ever believes them.

Paul and Adèle walked to the end of the platform. There they found that the interesting strangers were standing in front of the open door of the express office. Just outside the door was a pile of trunks of unfamiliar design, several of which were marked in large letters: "Runyon's Dramatic Aggregation."

Adèle pressed Paul's arm.

"They *are*," she said.

The man with the big moustache was still talking energetically.

"I tell you, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "it's all right. You know me, don't you?"

"Runyon," said the tall man with the crooked nose, who seemed to speak for the rest of the party, "we know you too blooming well. That's what's the matter."

The man with the crooked nose was undoubtedly an Englishman. He had a high sing-song voice that was as odd as his face.

"Well, then," said Mr. Runyon, grasping him by the lapel of his coat, with eager friendliness, "if you know me, you know I've got out of worse holes than this."

"May be you 'ave, Runyon," said the man

with the crooked nose; "may be you 'ave not. We cast no aspersions on your managerial skill. But on this occasion, dear boy, you 'ave our ultipomatum. Breakfast, dear boy, breakfast! Or I 'ock my fiddle, and back goes the Aggregation to the metropolis."

"Now, look here, Slingsby," pleaded Mr. Runyon, earnestly, "be a rational man and control your stummick until we get to Tunkawanna. As soon as I get hold of these confounded trunks, we'll start; and when we get to Tunkawanna, I'll blow you all off to the finest breakfast you ever had in your lives. See?"

Mr. Slingsby lifted from the platform a well-worn violin case, and, opening it, he drew forth the instrument.

"This has taken me 'ome before this," he said. "It takes this Aggregation 'ome now, unless you produce for the breakfast."

The Browns were walking back to the other end of the platform.

"Paul," said Adèle, in a shocked voice, "those people ought to have their breakfast. Think how *we* felt; and we only had to wait an hour."

"Yes, my dear," said Paul; "but I can't go and offer them breakfast, you know. It might wound their pride."

"No, dear," said Adèle; "but couldn't you go and offer to lend something to the—the man who has them in charge? I'm sure he's in a shocking position. Perhaps he's lost his pocket-book."

"Well," said Paul, rather dubiously, "I might go and see what's the matter."

"Go now," said Adèle, quickly. "See, he's left the others. I'm sure he's going to do something desperate."

Paul hurried off to Mr. Runyon, and caught him just as he was leaving the platform. A minute after that, Adèle noticed that Mr. Runyon had Paul by the lapel of his coat and was talking to him as earnestly as he had been talking to Mr. Slingsby. After a few minutes, Paul came back to Adèle. His manner betrayed some excitement.

"It's a most outrageous case of persecution," said Paul. "This man Runyon has invested all the savings of his lifetime in taking this company out on a tour of the provinces."

"The provinces?" said Adèle. "What are the provinces?"

"Well," said Paul, doubtfully, "so far, they seem to be New Jersey. Anyway, that's what he said. And he paid a man in New York ten thousand dollars for a play—it's called 'A Perfect Pet'—and he had a partner who was going to put up half the money, and the partner's run away and left him in the lurch; and now he's got so far on his trip, and some brute of a hotelkeeper is suing him for some debts that his partner contracted when he was here once before; and the man's got a judgment on his trunks for \$37.15. And they had nothing but paper in the house last night."

"What does that mean?" asked Adèle.

"I don't know," said Paul; "but it must be something in the nature of notes. He didn't get any cash, anyway. And now he says the play is on the very verge of a great success, and they're certain to make a lot of money at Tunkawanna to-night, if he can only get his trunks and get there. He says that of course he could stay here and fight the lawsuit, and he can get plenty of money from New York, but that will take time; and if he misses his engagement to-night, his whole tour will be ruined and he'll lose all the money he has invested. I think he said he put \$39,000 into the play."

"Dear me!" said Adèle; "it's the meanest thing I ever heard of! Couldn't you go to the hotel-keeper and explain it to him?"

"I am afraid that wouldn't do much good," said Paul; "but I could lend Mr. Runyon the money he needs to pay the judgment. I proposed that to him; of course it was a very delicate matter—but he was very nice about it. He'll give me his note, of course. And then—"

"Well?" queried Adèle.

"Why, he says," continued Paul, "that it's a splendid opening for a partner."

"For a partner?" queried Adèle, in amazement.

"Yes," said Paul, with heightened color; "for a partner."

"But, Paul, dear," said Adèle, dubiously, "isn't it just like that other business you wanted to go into—fifing? drumming?—What did you

call it? How can you be an actor's partner, if you aren't an actor yourself?"

"But, my dear," said Paul, "he's not an actor, he's a manager; don't you see?"

"Yes," said Adèle, "but you aren't. How can you be partners with a manager?"

"Why," said Paul, "don't you understand? It's just like my business with the syndicate. I know all about my patents, and I put up that knowledge against their capital. Now this is a precisely similar case. This man knows all about the business of managing, and he puts up that against my capital. He's been thirty years in the business. Now he puts up all that experience against my capital."

"But do you think that's quite fair to the man, Paul?" asked Adèle, looking a little worried, "if he puts up all those thirty years' experience and you put up only \$37.15?"

"Oh, well," said Paul, with some embarrassment, "it will be a little more than that. He says they'll probably need a little ready money to start with. And then, you know, we needn't consider it from a business point of view. And, of course, we can dissolve partnership whenever we're tired of traveling with them."

Adèle opened her eyes wide.

"Oh, are we going to travel with them?"

"Why, of course, that's the idea," said Paul.

"What, with all those—ladies?" asked Adèle.

"Why," said Paul, "don't you like them?"

"Oh, ye-es," said Adèle, in a doubtful tone.

She looked hard at the four ladies for a moment. Then her face brightened.

"I suppose, Paul," she said, "that if they make a great deal of money at Tunk—what's its name?—they'll buy this year's hats?"

"Why, yes; I suppose so," said Paul. "Aren't those this year's hats?"

"No, dear," replied Adèle, very decidedly, "they're not—not the least little bit in the world. And I'm sure," she added reflectively, "I don't know what year's hats they *are*."

"Well, dear, what do you say?" demanded Paul.

Adèle reflected for a moment.

"We wanted to have something happen," she said. "Well, Paul, I think we've got our chance."

IV.

WHEN the train rolled into Tunkawanna that afternoon at five o'clock, the Browns felt as if their new friends were very old friends indeed. Nine friendlier people they had never met—excepting Mr. Runyon, who traveled all the way in the baggage car; and, though he did not state his reason for this somewhat peculiar proceeding, he left them in such a frank, simple, unaffected manner that they saw clearly that he did not wish to keep them on formal terms.

As for the members of the company, it did not require more than ten minutes to establish an acquaintance with them. Mr. Slingsby not only introduced them all, but in a private chat with the Browns supplied various scraps of interesting information. "They aren't a nasty crowd to travel with," he said. "In my time, my boy, I've traveled with many a nastier. Delancey—that's that good-looking, pleasant, blue-eyed jackass in the third seat down on the other side of the car—he's playing our lead. He can't act—but then, my boy, how many leading men *can* act? That fat man with him is named Weegan. He comes from Peoria, and he thinks he's a low comedian. At 'ome—in England, you

know—when I was a youngster, they used such people for clowns in pantomimes. But we've got to take the world as we find it."

"Which do you mean?" inquired Paul; "the fat man with the diamond pin in his neck-tie?"

"Great Heavens, sir!" cried Mr. Slingsby, in a tone of withering contempt; "*that* man?" And he pointed to the stouter of the two stout men, who was placidly nodding off to sleep. "Is it possible—is it possible that you don't know Mingies?"

"I—I—" stammered Paul.

"No, my boy," said Mr. Slingsby, in a resigned singsong; "you don't know Mingies, and you don't know *Me*. But if it wasn't for Mingies, sir, I wouldn't be in this blooming barn-storming company. No, sir; my self-respect wouldn't permit it. There are just two actors in this company, my boy, and Mingies is the other one." Here Mr. Slingsby observed a troubled look on Paul's face, and hastened to add: "Understand me, my dear boy, it's an elegant company for the road. I am talking simply from an artistic standpoint. Now the *ladies*," he went on hurriedly, "the ladies are uncommonly strong. There are Miss La Tourette and Miss Obrian just in front of us," he whispered. "Young things; and they can't act much—but who does act much nowadays, my boy? That lady with the short hair is Miss Georgie Mingies. She hasn't her father's talent, but she's a fine girl—a fine girl, sir."

"And who," asked Adèle timidly, "is the elderly lady in the small hat?"

Mr. Slingsby started in genuine surprise. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "where did you two people come from?"

"Philadelphia," said Adèle.

"Ah!" said Mr. Slingsby. "That lady is Mrs. Sophia Wilks, formerly of Covent Garden, London. Everybody on this broad continent, except yourselves, my children, knows her as Aunt Sophy. When I first knew that lady, sir, she was one of the most charming soubrettes in the profession, and the most beautiful woman on the English stage. That was thirty years ago, my boy. Have you a cigar about you?"

Mr. Slingsby got a cigar and went into the smoking-car to smoke it. Then Mrs. Wilks lurched across the aisle and sat down in the seat opposite the Browns.

"My dears," she said affably, "don't believe one word that that man Slingsby tells you. He's a very nice fellow, but he'll never be an actor if he lives to be as old as Methusalem. I don't say he can't play the violin; but as for acting, why, bless your souls, it ain't in the man."

"I don't understand it," said Paul to Adèle, in a moment when they happened to be left alone; "it seems none of them can act except Mr. Mingies."

"And he's asleep," said Adèle.

It had begun to rain when they reached Tunk-

awanna. Perhaps this is not a very accurate way of describing what had happened to the weather; for such a sturdy, vigorous, well-established rain must have had its beginning several states off. It poured in great heavy sheets, through which they dimly descried an uninteresting town of low, brick houses, all very dirty and dingy with the smoke from the collieries, whose tall chimneys, high up on the neighboring hills, shot up flashes of deep red flames. The town of Tunkawanna, in truth, was little more than one dull, long, mean street, straggling along the edge of the broad river, whose further shore was lost in the wet darkness, out of which came the sound of its swift rushing, clearly to be heard above the roar of the rain.

Adèle slipped her hand into Paul's arm as she gazed down the dismal street.

"Oh, Paul," she whispered; "how awfully gloomy!"

"Gloomy it is," said Mr. Slingsby, just behind them; "and not an umbrella in the 'ole crowd."

"Runyon, my dear," said Aunt Sophia cheerfully to her manager, "you are standing treat to umbrellas, I suppose, as usual?"

Adèle pressed Paul's arm, and he spoke up hastily.

"Perhaps it wouldn't be convenient—" he began, "I mean—if Mr. Runyon will permit me—I'll be very happy—"

"To set up the umbrellas?" broke in Mr. Slingsby. "Ah, my boy, I knew you were a

thoroughbred from the moment I laid my eyes on you. Come with me, and I'll show you an elegant establishment."

The two gentlemen dashed through the rain across the street to a little shop where a very little Hebrew boy, whose head hardly came across the counter, opened his dark and dreamy eyes astonishingly wide at receiving an order for eleven umbrellas. Then he gasped once and recovered his self-possession.

"Make it one dozen," he said, "un' I gif you a discount."

"Take him," said Mr. Slingsby, nudging Paul; "the extra one may come in 'andy."

They returned to the station, and, leaving Mr. Runyon to superintend the men who were to take the trunks to the theatre, the Aggregation started up the street, Aunt Sophy piloting the two Browns.

"I have played in this town eleven times," said she; "and every time it rained, except one, and then there was an earthquake."

The gentlemen of the company had dropped behind. From time to time Adèle missed the sound of their feet. This puzzled her a little, and after a while she looked over her shoulders. She observed that, although the four gentlemen had started with five umbrellas, they were now clustered under one. And even as she looked she saw them suddenly deviate from the straight path and disappear into one of the numerous liquor-saloons scattered along the way. When

they came out they had no umbrella at all. But they wiped their mouths and turned up their coat-collars, and trudged cheerily along in the rain.

Thus they reached the Tunkawanna hotel, which was quite the smallest, darkest and dirtiest hostelry that Paul and Adèle had ever seen. Mr. Runyon had already passed them, seated on his truck-load of trunks, and at the door of the hotel they found him earnestly conversing with the proprietor. He had the proprietor by the lapel of his coat, and the proprietor was shaking his head in a stubborn sort of way. As soon as Mr. Runyon saw Paul, he hurriedly drew him aside.

"This is a peculiar sort of place, Mr. Brown," said he, "and they've got a sort of invariable rule about getting their pay in advance. I am an old friend of the proprietor's, but he says he can't break it even for me. You understand? I told him you'd see to it as soon as you came."

"Oh, certainly," said Paul.

Paul went into the office, where he paid the hotel proprietor \$8.25. The proprietor swept it into his till and shut the drawer with a loud slam. As the lock snapped, he whistled a brief and peculiar melody which Paul vaguely remembered having heard as a boy.

"What is that tune?" he inquired of the proprietor, for there seemed to him something peculiarly suggestive about it.

"'Over the fence is out,'" said the proprietor.

V

“**D**EAR me, Paul!” said Adèle, “I never should know this was a theatre if it wasn’t for the smell.”

They had eaten a curious and unpleasant meal at the Tunkawanna hotel, and now they sat in a curious and unpleasant little den at the extreme rear of the Tunkawanna Opera House. They hardly knew how they had got there. They had gone through the stage door with a little shiver of delightful expectation. Then they had shivered in another way as cold draughts had poured on them from every direction. They had felt their way through dark passages, and climbed up rickety stairs. They had rubbed against walls greasy with the touch of many hands, dusty walls, and walls coated thick with whitewash. Then, with a consciousness of being smirched and disheveled, they had emerged upon the stage of the theatre, a barn-like place where three or four men were clumsily arranging tall wooden frames covered with canvas. The canvas was splashed with great daubs of pale dull color.

“Is it really *scenery*, Paul?” asked Adèle.

“I am afraid it is,” said Paul, vaguely discerning in the dull blots and splotches something that seemed like a dim caricature of trees and

foliage. But, oh! how disappointing it all was! How bare, how cold, how lifeless, how dismal! All the light came from a row of gas jets on the top of what looked like an overgrown music stand, from which a long rubber pipe trailed off into the darkness. Beyond this line of light they saw a gloomy cavern with rows of empty seats, the backs of which were staring at them in an unfriendly way.

It did not seem possible that they had sat in just such seats and gazed, enraptured, on scenes of glowing color and graceful form. They both felt for the moment as if they had been cheated out of every dollar they had ever paid for going to theatres.

Then Mr. Runyon saw them, and called them up to be introduced to the proprietor of the Opera House.

He was a very fat Jewish gentleman, Mr. Jacobs, who had little attention to pay to them, being too much employed in using unkind language to the stage-hands. They caught a few glimpses of the members of the company, who had assorted themselves among various small dens at the back of the stage, from which they occasionally came forth in progressive stages of disfigurement, their faces smeared with paint and spotted with patches of impossible hair. It was all a dreary nightmare, the more ghastly that it seemed extremely business-like, and that the two lonely Browns had no place in it. It was really a relief when Mr. Runyon, remembering their

existence, hustled them into a bleak little room overhanging the rushing river, which he said was the greenroom.

"You'd better sit here a bit," he said, "and be out of the way."

They couldn't help feeling that they were very much in the way.

.

"Paul, dear," said Adèle, "so far, I don't think the theatrical business is very nice, do you?"

Paul was looking out of the window over the river.

"It isn't very cheerful," he replied. "But, Good Gracious, Adèle! Look here!"

Adèle joined him at the window and peered with him into the darkness below.

"Why, Paul," she said, "it's Mr. Slingsby. What is he doing?"

It *was* Mr. Slingsby. He was standing just under the window, on the stone wall that curbed the river bank, and he was carefully examining the fastening of a rowboat that was tossing restlessly on the swollen breast of the stream. After a moment or two he was joined by Mr. Mingies and a boy, who carried a trunk between them. They exchanged a few words in a whisper, and then they lowered the trunk into the boat, and the boy rowed off into the darkness. In a few minutes he returned, but the trunk was not in the boat. Mr. Slingsby and Mr. Mingies,

who had retired into the theatre building, reappeared with another trunk, and the boy rowed it away in the same manner. Three times was this mysterious performance repeated. Then Adèle, remembering the fate of the umbrellas, cried out suddenly:

“Why, Paul, they can’t be exchanging those trunks for things to drink!”

Both of the gentlemen on the bank below started violently, as they heard Adèle’s voice. They looked up and saw the two faces at the window and then each of them laid a finger on his lips, and said “Sh-h-h-h!” in a very significant and tragic manner.

“Mr. Slingsby,” said Paul, severely, “are we deceived in you? What does this mean?”

“Sh-h-h-h!” said Mr. Slingsby again. “It’s all right, dear boy; ’pon me honor it’s all right.”

“What are you doing with those trunks?” demanded Paul.

“Sh-h-h-h!” hissed Mr. Slingsby. “For ’eaven’s sake, *sh-h-h-h!!* Is Runyon there?”

“No,” said Paul.

“Look over your shoulder,” whispered Mr. Slingsby. “’E’s a devil for snooping.”

“I tell you,” said Paul, “we are alone. But I want to know what you are doing with those trunks.”

“Dear boy,” hissed Mr. Slingsby, waving his hands wildly, “just listen to your old uncle for one minute. They’re after Runyon again!”

“Who are?” asked Paul.

"Why, the sheriffs," said Mr. Slingsby. "They always are, you know. There are more judgments out against Runyon than any man in the country."

"And they are right onto him in Tunkawanna," said Mr. Mingies, solemnly.

"That they are," Mr. Slingsby chimed in. "It's good-by to the trunks if they get them here. There's two of the Sheriff's men in front of the house now. Jacobs is trying to bluff them, but it won't be any use. There's nothing for us to do but to get out, and get out quick. You lower your wife down out of that window, and drop after her. Let her down easy and you can just get her feet on my shoulders. I've taken ladies out of that window before."

"But what's going to become of the play to-night?" cried Adèle. "How can they have any play if you all run away?"

"There won't be any play to-night," said Mr. Delancey, emerging from the door beneath the Browns, "unless Runyon plays the Sheriff for a sucker. And that ain't likely. We've been here five times before."

"'Urry up," said Mr. Slingsby, beseechingly; "the ladies will be here in a minute. They are just washing up and getting their things on."

"Do you mean," said Paul, in a voice of indignation, "that we are to run away from the Sheriff?"

"You bet," said Mr. Delancey, flippantly; "and mighty lively, too."

"Well," said Paul, "I will not be a party to any such proceedings. I am Mr. Runyon's partner, and whatever legal difficulties he may have gotten into, I will stay and face them out with him."

Here Mr. Mingies spoke forth for the first time, in the full round voice of authority.

"Young man," he said, "you are young. From your looks, I should take you to be twenty-five, and from your experience of the world I am led to think that you are about nineteen. If you remain in this town of Tunkawanna to fight the judgments that Runyon has run up in the last fifteen years, you will be a middle-aged man before you get through with the last case. Now you take the advice of one who has had experience in this profession. You have a wife there. Let her down easy out of that window, and we'll be in the State of Pennsylvania inside of fifteen minutes. Mr. Slingsby will assist the lady."

Mr. Slingsby promptly backed up to the wall, braced his tall form against it, squared his shoulders, and, with knightly courtesy, dropped his chin upon his breast. A moment later, Adèle was gently lowered to the ground by three pairs of gallant hands.

The Brown family found some difficulty in getting into the stern of the boat, for the water was high and rough, and the stone wall was slippery. Adèle clung closely to Paul. The black night frightened her, the roar of the river, and

the fitful, furious onslaughts of the wind and rain.

It brought a sense of positive comfort to her heart to hear the cheerful, motherly voice of Aunt Sophy Wilks, and to see her massive form descending into the boat. Mrs. Wilks was as calm and unperturbed as though she were the Queen of England receiving her friends.

"Ah, my dear," she said, "it's you, is it? Glad you're going to be with us. But this sporting life is killing me. It's too volatile and I'm too weighty. Say, boys," she continued, addressing the gentlemen on the bank, "you'd better hurry up. I think they've got Runyon." Mr. Delancey put his head in the black doorway and called softly up the stairs:

"Hi, girls," he said, "hurry up!"

A minute passed, and then the two Browns, rocking madly in the rowboat, which the boy vainly tried to steady with the oars, looked up and saw four more dark figures appear upon the wet and wind-swept stone wall.

With many little muffled cries of fright, the ladies were lowered into the boat. There were two pairs of oars, and Mr. Delancey took one pair.

"It's a good thing, Delancey," said Mr. Slingsby, "that you can row."

He laid a peculiar and severe emphasis upon the word "row," which must have conveyed an unpleasant meaning to Mr. Delancey, for he frankly and simply responded:

"You be damned!"

"Cast off!" said Mr. Mingies to the boy, with the air of a Rear Admiral.

The boy clambered up to the top of the bank and began to struggle with the knot of the painter, while the ten people in the rowboat huddled together in their crowded quarters, and tried to trim the craft.

"Aunt Sophy," inquired Mr. Slingsby, "are you dead over the keel?"

"If I was an inch to one side," replied Aunt Sophy gravely, "it would be the end of this boat-load."

And then for a moment it seemed as if the end had come. That furious last gust which rounds up a great storm struck them as suddenly as a flash of lightning, snapping the painter as if it had been a thread, and drove the boat into the angry, rushing current of the river. The women shrieked as they were swept into the darkness; and, blacker than all the black things about them, the great arches of the railroad bridge loomed up in their path. Then the torrent swept them madly through that dim gateway; and as they rushed on into the howling darkness, Mingies, who had cast one hasty look behind, remarked casually:

"Runyon got out the back window."

VI

“O H, Paul,” whispered Adèle, touching his hand, “do you think there’s any danger?”

“No,” said Paul, reassuringly; “not the least.” But his heart sank as he put his arm around his wife and drew her close to him.

“Oh, Paul,” she cried with a gasp, “how wicked we were not to be content!”

Just as she spoke, there was a sound like a pistol shot, and Mr. Delancey was thrown off his seat into the bottom of the boat. Then he scrambled up with a white face and reached out madly over the side. One of his oars had broken and the other had been torn from his hand.

Adèle hid her face on Paul’s breast, and the two sat silent. But their companions were not silent. Their voices rose up in cries that ought to have been heard on either shore, and they must have rushed for ten minutes through that black and howling tempest before Slingsby and Mingies, who alone retained something like self-possession, could induce them even to sit still and minimize the risk of capsizing.

“Is that Aunt Sophy yelling like that?”

shouted Mr. Slingsby from the bow to Mr. Mingies in the stern. "Don't let her move, Mingies!"

"I'm sitting in her lap," shouted back the ponderous, but long-headed Mr. Mingies, "or we'd have been at the bottom before this."

For some space the boat was whirled along, but whether they were hours or minutes in the power of the tempest, not one could tell. They had lost all sense of direction; they could not even see the whitecapped water ten feet from the boat, and it seemed as though they were being hurled into infinite space through eternal night.

Suddenly they stopped with a crash and a jar that threw them in all directions. The chorus of shrieks arose again as the boat went to pieces under them and let them down into the water.

They did not have very far to go, however. Paul and Adèle found themselves sitting in a great deal of mud and very little water; and as the truth broke upon the minds of the others, that they were in no immediate danger of drowning, their alarm gradually subsided.

"Take 'old of 'ands," cried the ever-ready Mr. Slingsby. "We'll make a line and strike for the shore. Where are you, Mingies?"

The voice of Mr. Mingies boomed suddenly out of the darkness.

"Here," he said, in a tone of deep feeling. "And Mrs. Wilks and I are settling about six inches every minute."

Just here they heard a shriek that was without doubt from Aunt Sophia.

"What's the matter there, Mingies?" Mr. Slingsby called out.

There was great relief expressed in Mr. Mingies's voice as he cheerfully bellowed back:

"It's all right now, Slingsby; it's all right. Mrs. Wilks has touched rock."

After a good deal of groping in the darkness, the more active members of the party formed a line, and each holding the other firmly by the hand, they began to feel their way toward the shore, through a darkness that seemed even deeper than they had previously encountered. Suddenly they were startled by a profane remark from Mr. Slingsby, who led the line.

"What is it?" cried Mr. Delancey, apprehensively.

"I bumped my head," replied Mr. Slingsby.

"Bumped your head?" cried his friends, in amazement.

"Against what?" demanded Paul.

"Against the Washington Monument, I should say by the feel of it," answered Mr. Slingsby, in his plaintive singsong. "It's 'arder than my 'ead, whatever it is."

"Oh, Paul," cried Adèle, desperately, "where do you suppose we are?"

"Slingsby," said Mr. Mingies, solemnly, "do you remember that when we were here, five years ago, we had a little picnic down the river?"

"Yes," said Mr. Slingsby.

"A very enjoyable occasion?" continued Mr. Mingies.

"Yes," said Mr. Slingsby.

"Under the shore arch of a stone bridge?" pursued Mr. Mingies.

"Yes," said Mr. Slingsby.

"Well," said Mr. Mingies, "we are under that arch now. I can see the lights of the tavern on the other side of the river."

"Begad, you're right," said Mr. Slingsby. "Let's have another picnic!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Mingies; "the moon is just coming out."

The storm had sunk a little, and one or two patches of light had appeared in the black sky, affording just enough illumination to reveal their situation to the castaways. It was far from pleasant. They were ashore, certainly; but the water had risen so high that it had covered everything except a little pile of rocks that lay against one side of the great arch, midway between its two ends. Mr. Slingsby painfully groped his way, first to right and then to left, and reported deep water in both directions. Mr. Delancey was with great difficulty induced to lead an exploring party down the stream, but, although he wore no watch, he refused to go in deeper than his watch-pocket, and came back in disgust. Paul tried to stem the current and to get up-stream, but after stepping into a hole and finding the water on a level with his ears, he agreed with Adèle that his duty was to stay by her side.

"There appears to be," said Mr. Slingsby,

who was fumbling around and trying to familiarize himself with the boundaries of his pile of rocks, "a species of peninsula here which might at least accommodate the ladies. The sterner sex can sit at the base of the throne, as it were, and let the water flow through their trousers."

"A great mind that Slingsby has," said Mr. Weegan, who happened to be standing next to Paul. "It's a pity he can't act."

By dint of hard work the ladies were got upon the rocks. The entire party was obliged to form a line to haul Mr. Mingies and Mrs. Wilks from their anchorage; but finally five wet, cold, shivering women were pushed up the slippery stones, where they huddled together against the masonry. Below them the men crowded as far out of the water as they could get. And thus they disposed themselves to await the dawn.

The river rushed madly by, roaring through the great hollow of the arch. The wind poured in on them in a way that made even the stout-hearted Slingsby observe that there was more draught than he cared about. Adèle sobbed quietly, with her head on Paul's shoulder.

"Oh, dear!" she said, "who would have thought it could have been so wicked just to want a little change? Don't you feel horribly wicked, Paul?"

"I feel wet," said Paul.

Their teeth chattered, and their bones ached. Even Mr. Slingsby could joke no longer. Everybody was sinking into a dull stupor of misery,

except Aunt Sophia Wilks, who was moving around on the topmost stone of the heap, in a way that excited the attention of Miss Mingies.

"Aunt Sophy," she cried, "what *are* you doing?"

About this time the rest of the shipwrecked travelers became conscious of a peculiar, yet an agreeable and familiar odor, which overcame the smell of the river and the damp stones.

Mr. Mingies rose to his feet.

"Georgie," he demanded, "did you have a bottle of cologne in your pocket?"

"Yes, Papa," said Miss Mingies.

"Then Aunt Sophy's got it. Take it from her."

But here the voice of Mrs. Wilks rose in indignant protest.

"I scorn your insinuations," she cried; "and if my 'usband was not in his grave you would not dare address such language to me. Cologne, indeed!"

"Have you got it?" asked Mr. Mingies of Miss Mingies.

"Paul," demanded Adèle, in a horrified whisper, "what is cologne made of?"

"It is principally alcohol, I believe, my dear," answered Paul.

"Oh, if my 'usband were here," wailed Mrs. Wilks. "Oh, Robert, Robert!"

Mr. Mingies resumed his seat in the river. "It is the last infirmity of a noble mind," he said, "and I hope it will keep her warm."

VII

IT did not keep Mrs. Wilks warm, but it made her talkative and tearful; and, whereas she had hitherto been the most composed and cheerful of the party, she now showed a disposition to accept even the kindest attempts at consolation in a spirit of bitter resentment. Moreover, it took her mind back to the golden days of her youth, when she had reveled in luxury and had known the protecting care of a husband.

The spell of old memories must have been strong upon Mrs. Wilks, for she occasionally dropped her "H's."

Her lamentations were fitful, being interrupted by brief stretches of slumber, from which she would wake to wail over her lot, and to call upon her departed helpmate.

"Never, never," she cried, "was I accustomed to this sort of thing, nor educated for it! Oh, if I 'ad you 'ere, my 'usband! Oh, George, George!"

"Paul," whispered Adèle in his ear, "did you hear that? She spoke of her husband as George, and I am sure she called him Robert just a little while ago."

"Yes, dear," said Paul, "and I think you

must have had a little nap, or you would have heard her refer to him some time ago as Alexander."

"Oh, Paul, dear," Adèle whispered, "this is dreadful!"

"Look there!" cried Paul, suddenly; "there's the sun!"

It is only at times such as these that commonplace folk realize something of the beauty of that miracle that occurs three hundred and sixty-five times in every year—the birth of a new day. The Browns had come out for adventure, and to see what life had to show them; and in that moment they both felt that they were looking upon one of the most beautiful things that had ever happened to the earth. And yet they might have seen it any day in the year out of any one of their east windows.

"How heavenly!" whispered Adèle in hushed rapture.

"Yes," said Paul; "and that's the tavern right over there on the other side of the river."

"That's so," said Adèle, looking, with a new interest in her brown eyes, at the low, comfortable white building that began to rise above the river mist, among a clump of huge willows just across the stream.

"Doesn't it seem to you, Paul, as if you had never thought before just what a nice thing breakfast is, too?"

"I'm going to have some breakfast," said Paul, "if I have to swim for it. Here, let's

wake these people up. I'm blessed if they aren't all asleep."

"I don't believe," remarked Adèle, reflectively, "that they mind *anything*. But don't wake them up for just a minute—look, dear!"

They were both of them stiff and sore and tired; but, as they looked out upon the new morning, it was all so fresh and fair, so bright from its bath of rain, so tender in its summery greens, softened by the delicate gray haze that hung over the river and lifted a little and then faded out from the face of Nature, as if to cheat the eye, that they could think of nothing but the beauty before them; and their awakening hearts were stronger than their stiffened limbs.

Like the light of eyes that awake and look into the face of a loved one, the landscape came out of the mist. They were far away from the town, out in the happy country. The broad river flowed by them, still rippling in its fullness, but clear and pure. There were green fields and patches of woodland on either side, and right opposite them that comfortable and home-like looking tavern stood white among the great green willows with their brownish-yellow trunks. And, as they stepped out upon the stones that the rapidly subsiding waters had left bare, they saw the graceful line of the big stone bridge reaching across to the other side, arch after arch, bearing on its broad shoulders the road that led to the open door of the old hostelry. The door was open; they could see it from where they stood

on the stones, with the water just at the soles of their shoes. And it seemed as if Breakfast actually beckoned to them from that welcoming portal.

They stood there for a minute or two, and took a brief proprietorship in the sun and the sky and the green woods and the quick rushing river, and then they set about wakening their companions. Mrs. Wilks was the most difficult to rouse. For a long time she only grunted in an amiable way, as often as Paul shook her. At last she opened her eyes and said, as one talking in a dream:

"Cologne? No, never. I deny it!"

And then she rubbed her eyes and awoke definitively. A puzzled look came into her face as she put her hand to her head.

"Where did I get it?" she inquired of Miss Georgie Mingies.

"My cologne," said Miss Mingies, simply.

"I'll give you another bottle, my dear," said Mrs. Wilks. "Just as soon as the luck turns."

"Aunt Sophy," said Miss Mingies, with impressive decision, "you always were a lady."

"She always was," returned Mr. Slingsby, pleasantly. "Now, will the lady wade, or will she go out of this pick-a-back?"

"Aren't you broke enough as it is?" inquired Aunt Sophy, who was evidently fast recovering the use of her faculties. "I'll walk, as far as I'm concerned. I'd like to rinse off a little."

There was no longer any difficulty in getting

out of their uncomfortable quarters, and the bedraggled party slowly but safely made its way to the shore, and started over the bridge toward the tavern. Each member of the group was becoming conscious of a new stiffened joint at each step of the way.

"Did you ever see a second-hand set of marionettes?" said Mr. Slingsby.

Paul had never had that experience.

"Well, that's the movement we've got on us," said Mr. Slingsby.

With the soft glow of the early morning sun illuminating their damp and clinging garments, the remains of the Aggregation and the two Browns presented themselves at the tavern-door. They were all partners in misery and equals in misfortune, so far as the eye could see. There was nothing now to distinguish Mrs. Brown's hat, in respect to social position, from even the worst of those worn by her sisters in distress, which was unquestionably the strange and towering structure that topped the head of Mrs. Wilks.

And yet they smiled as they looked at each other, and not with the derisive smile with which the inn-keeper regarded them, but with the happy and innocent smile which children at their play exchange with one another. Wet and stiff and sore, fellowshiping with vagabonds in the same plight as themselves, the Browns were having a good time.

"Well, you *are* a healthy looking lot!" said

the fat, red-faced landlord, as he gazed upon them. "Be'n out in the wet, ain't you?"

"Damn his impudence!" said Mr. Slingsby to Paul. "He thinks there isn't any money in the crowd. He little knows—"

Here a sudden misgiving caused Mr. Slingsby to change his confident expression.

"Say," he whispered, anxiously, "you *have* got some scads, haven't you?"

"Scads?" repeated Paul, doubtfully.

"Yes. Plunks — gold — spondulix — cash — money, you know," exclaimed Mr. Slingsby. "Runyon didn't get away with all you had, did he?"

"No," said Paul, smiling. "I think I have enough for our present necessities."

"Oh, it's all right," said Mr. Slingsby, much relieved. "Then see me jump on that brute's neck!"

And Mr. Slingsby straightened himself up and infused into his person an air of grandeur, which not even his dampness could diminish. Then he sternly advanced upon the landlord.

"Are you intoxicated?" he demanded severely, and in so peremptory a tone that the landlord gasped rather than said:

"Naw!"

"Then," said Mr. Slingsby, "your insolence is inexcusable." He turned with a lofty air to Miss Mingies, who was trying to look unconcerned while she pinned up a gap in the rear of her skirt. "Lady Georgianna," he said, waving

his hand toward Mrs. Wilks, who showed indications of being about to go to sleep standing, "will you kindly conduct the Countess into that apology for an apartment which I see on my right? And Lord Delancey will see to the comfort of the rest of the ladies, while I give my orders to this fellow. Baron," he continued, addressing Paul, "I shall need your advice in the preparation of a menu for our breakfast. I suppose this person can be taught to serve something eatable."

Then, haughtily signaling to the landlord to follow him, he strode into the barroom.

The landlord's eyes almost started from his head.

"You had better make haste," observed Mr. Delancey, with a stern, yet condescending manner. "Lord Slingsby is in no mood to be trifled with. Is it not strange," he said to Mrs. Brown, "that when one's carriage breaks down, it always breaks down where there is nothing better than such a hole as this within ten miles? But I suppose you can't expect anything better in this blarsted country."

The landlord was by this time of a fine, rich purple color. He made one or two vain attempts to speak; but finding that he only produced a sort of stifled gurgle, he gave it up, and meekly followed Mr. Slingsby into the barroom.

The landlord had a bad quarter of an hour with Mr. Slingsby in the barroom. Mr. Slingsby opened the proceedings by asking Paul, in an

offhand manner, if he remembered what he had done with the bill-of-fare from the Hôtel Aristocratique.

"That was a fairly satisfactory repast," he observed, "and may afford us some suggestions. I think you put it in your wallet, dear boy."

Twenty-four hours before, Paul would probably have asked him what he meant, or told him outright that he knew nothing of any bill-of-fare or any Hôtel Aristocratique. But now it was with a feeling of having been born into a new world, and a world where, even under the most depressing conditions, life seemed to have a wonderful lot of fun about it, that Paul impressively produced his comfortable-looking pocketbook—it was wet and out of shape, but its contents gave it a look of comfort—carelessly pulled out a ten dollar bill or two in a pretended search for the imaginary menu, and then told Mr. Slingsby that he thought he must have forgotten it.

"Too bad," said Mr. Slingsby. "Well, let's see! Suppose we have some—er—Consommé à la Périgord and some Bêchamel aux Pollyopkins, and—er—Perquisites à la Tuberculosis—and how would a little Eucalyptus with egg-sauce à la Pajama do to end up with? You could serve a simple meal like that without keeping us waiting, I suppose?" he inquired of the landlord, in an airy, contemptuous tone.

When Mr. Slingsby had satisfied his soul with torture, the landlord was the humblest of created things. He compromised on ham and eggs.

VIII

NOTHING had been said about it, but it seemed to be generally understood that, so far as money matters were concerned, Mr. Paul Brown had entire charge of the company's affairs. He found that he was looked upon in the light of the vanished Runyon—nay, more than this—he seemed to have become a sort of financial father to the whole Aggregation. Paul was not of an illiberal disposition, but he felt that the time was fast approaching when the line must be drawn in this matter. At Mr. Slingsby's suggestion he hired rooms for the entire company, but when he and Adèle went to their chamber to try to smarten themselves up a little before breakfast, he talked it over with Mrs. Brown, and they came to a very decided conclusion.

The breakfast was a long time in preparation; partly, perhaps, because most of the members of the company were drying themselves around the kitchen stove. Paul put his head into the kitchen and found all his friends there, socially steaming together. He made up his mind that he and Adèle would go out and dry on the sunshiny lawn between the tavern and the beach.

Here, as they walked up and down, they were joined by Mr. Slingsby, who hailed them as cheerily as though the situation were an everyday experience.

"The modest meal," he remarked, "is well nigh ready. I 'ave procured access to the larder, and 'ave routed out a few humble viands to swell the bill-of-fare."

"Mr. Slingsby," said Paul, "I trust you will make our breakfast as satisfactory as possible in every respect, for when it is concluded we shall part company. Mrs. Brown and I have made up our minds to retire from the theatrical business. Mr. Runyon's departure has left certain responsibilities upon my hands, of which I shall endeavor to acquit myself. I will discharge our present indebtedness at this place, and I will put in your hands a sum sufficient to carry the entire company back to New York. After that, Mrs. Brown and I will resume our trip, which will necessarily take us in another direction. I have not the slightest doubt that an Aggregation of such talent as yours will readily find regular and steady employment in the city."

Mr. Slingsby stared hard at Paul for a moment; then he raised his right hand, and looked solemnly aloft.

"By 'Eaven's," he said; "The Prince of Jays! I knew he was too good to be true!" Then he grasped Paul warmly by the hand.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "your proposition does you infinite credit, and I shall be extremely happy

to serve as your disbursing agent. I need not tell you, I suppose, how much I regret that we must sever?"

"You need not, Mr. Slingsby," replied Paul, "but I trust you will allow me to assure you that Mrs. Brown and I have heartily enjoyed making your acquaintance and that of your friends, and that our brief connection has been of great interest, and, I may say, benefit to us."

"I am glad to 'ear it," said Mr. Slingsby. "I 'ave certainly tried to do my best by you. And, in reflecting upon this occurrence in future years, it will always be a great satisfaction to me that I 'ad 'old of you, and not an ignorant and unappreciative 'og like Runyon, who has not the first instincts of a gentleman, and never knows when it is time to let go."

And with a profound bow to Mrs. Brown, Mr. Slingsby moved off. He had not gone far, however, when a thought struck him, and he returned.

"Under the circumstances," he said, with a kindly smile, "it might not be amiss if we were to garnish the occasion with a few bottles of such wine as the country affords?"

"Certainly not," said Paul.

"Then we garnish," said Mr. Slingsby. "My boy, you *are* a thoroughbred!"

The breakfast was served on the broad back verandah of the tavern, overlooking the water, and it was a very jolly meal, although ham and eggs predominated in its composition. They washed the ham and eggs down with champagne.

Everybody agreed that the practice of drinking wine so early in the morning was improper in the extreme; but they all drank it. Shipwrecked people are entitled to certain indulgences, and as Mr. Slingsby truly remarked, the champagne which the landlord furnished was little better than an inflated cider. So they ate and drank, and felt happy that they were alive, and that they were all such good people together; and after a while a happy golden haze seemed to wrap the whole party in a dreamy delight. When they had finished, they pushed back their chairs and sat contentedly gazing at the beauty of the river under the morning sunshine. Then Mr. Slingsby bewailed the fact that his fiddle was packed in his trunk, on the wharf opposite the theater, in Tunkawanna. The landlord heard him, and eagerly offered the loan of his own personal and private violin. Mr. Slingsby loftily accepted the offer, and when the instrument came, he began to sing to them, in a pleasant, old-fashioned falsetto, a string of old-fashioned songs — sea-songs, the most of them. He sang "Tom Bowling," "Wrap Me Up in my Tarpaulin Jacket," "Black-eyed Susan," and other sweet, old, simple, silly strains, while the golden haze grew more and more golden, and some of the elder eyes grew moist, and Aunt Sophy Wilks cried softly to herself, like a fat old child.

It was long past ten o'clock before they finished their breakfast, and they would not have finished it then if Adèle had not called Paul's

attention to two facts: first, that the stage for Tunkawanna and the New York train left at eleven: second, that several of the company, including Mr. Mingies and Mr. Weegan, were expressing so warm an admiration for their present surroundings that they could not be contemplating less than a fortnight's stay.

After having been thus reminded, it did occur to Paul that his intimacy with those gentlemen was increasing at an uncommonly rapid rate, and that if he called Mr. Slingsby "dear old man" a few times more, he would probably find the Brown family tied for life, and, before they knew it, to the wreck of Runyon's Dramatic Aggregation. Still the golden haze enveloped his young head, and Paul never knew exactly how he did succeed in getting his eight friends off on the stage, which presently lumbered up to the door of the inn. The parting scene was very affecting. Every one of the gentlemen privately borrowed ten dollars of Paul; the ladies all kissed Adèle; then Mrs. Wilks kissed Paul, and dropped a fat tear upon his cheek. Mr. Mingies bestowed a fatherly salute upon Adèle, and then the stage-driver interfered, and with his aid, and that of the landlord and the hostler, and a stray negro stable-boy, the eight dramatic artists were finally stowed away in and on various parts of the stage, and started off for Tunkawanna to redeem their trunks, and to take the train for New York. There was much kissing of hands and waving of handkerchiefs, and, with the best intentions, but somewhat inappropriately,

Mr. Mingies, in a deep bass voice, started the chorus of "Good-night, Ladies," as they rolled over the bridge in the morning sun.

The two Browns watched them from the back porch until they had crossed the bridge and swept into the high road. Then, just as they were turning away, Adèle gave a cry of astonishment.

"Look, Paul!" she said.

Paul looked. From a clump of bushes which the stage was passing, a tall man in a silk hat dashed wildly forth, with two other men in close pursuit. The tall man ran after the stage with a speed that must have been born of desperation, unless he was a professional sprinter. He caught it, with his pursuers ten yards in the rear, and, grasping the baggage-rack, drew himself up, and was hauled to the top by Mr. Slingsby and Mr. Mingies. The other two men shouted to the driver, and one waved a bunch of white papers, but the driver appeared not to hear, for he whipped up his horses, and the stage rolled merrily around the corner.

It was Mr. Runyon.

IX

AFTER breakfast, Adèle went to her room to lie down. She told Paul he had better lie down, too. Her advice was good, and perhaps Paul had better have followed it, but he said that he was not sleepy, and he thought the fresh air would do him good, and he would walk about the grounds a little.

He began by walking around the house, which he found a very interesting structure, for it was old and rambling. At one end there was a sort of shed-like roof extending over the driveway, and under this stood a tin-peddler's wagon, very neat, very new, and painted the brightest and most beautiful red that you can imagine. In the shafts stood a little sorrel mare, quite as neat as the wagon, but much less gaudy. He did not know exactly why he did it, but when Paul saw the wagon he sat down on a stone and regarded it attentively.

He had seen many red wagons in the course of his life, but it seemed to Paul, just at that moment, that that particular red wagon was far and away the prettiest red wagon he had ever seen. And it also seemed to him, at that particular moment, that a red wagon of just the right sort was a singularly beautiful and desirable

object. He wondered who owned that wagon, and whether the man knew what a good thing he had in owning such a wagon. Paul had his doubts about this. It took, he thought, a certain delicacy of mind rightly to value a red wagon. The owner was probably a soulless person, who looked upon his possession merely in the light of a wagon to which redness was incidental. He felt that it would be a good thing in the interests of abstract beauty, to rescue that red wagon from such a man, who would, in all probability, let it get muddy.

He had got to this point in his musings when he happened to look up, and saw Adèle seated at the window of her room, with her chin upon her hands. She was gazing intently, even rapturously, at the red wagon.

Then she, too, looked up, and their eyes met.

Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks were flushed.

"Oh, Paul," she said, softly, but he could hear her quite distinctly, "how perfectly delightful it would be to ride about the country together in a dear little red wagon like that, and peddle those delightful shiny tin things!"

Two hours later a surprised tin-peddler and a puzzled landlord went for the third time over a large stack of bank-notes.

"Eight twenties, eleven tens and twenty-one fives. Three hundred and seventy-five dollars,"

said the tin-peddler; "and every bill is good. You can't fool me on money. Now, what in the witherin' blazes do you make of it?"

The landlord cast a furtive glance at a great tray of empty champagne-bottles, which a waiter happened to be carrying through the room at that moment. Then he engaged the tin-peddler's eye with a look of profound thoughtfulness.

"Them theatrical folks is always kinder queer and freaky," he said.

X

PAUL and Adèle were perched on the high front seat of the little red wagon. Paul had his foot on the brake, and was carefully guiding the sorrel mare down a steep hill on the road that led from the inn in the direction away from Tunkawanna. Adèle held in one hand a piece of thin board, about the size of a school slate, faced with white paper on which were inscribed various strange figures and characters in red and black ink. This tablet she compared from time to time with some little slips of paper which she held in her lap with the other hand.

Paul looked hard at the horse, and his face wore an expression of gloomy thought—the expression of a young man from around whose youthful head a golden haze is rapidly evaporating, and who sees himself, through the fast-lessening mist, seated upon a red wagon, much like the rest of this world's red wagons, driving a sorrel mare possessed of few points beyond the generality of sorrel mares. But Adèle's face was undimmed by the slightest cloud.

“Isn't it perfect fun, Paul dear?” she said. “And *such* a relief! Of course they were all very nice, you know, and I am sure it was very interesting; but then, you know, of course it couldn't

last. And now I do feel so free and independent, don't you, dear?"

"O—eh—yes; why, certainly," assented Paul.

"The only thing I can't make out, Paul," said Adèle, "is how to get the *h* and the *z* part of this price-list right; and so long as I can't get that straight, of course it is perfectly impossible to make anything of the *n*'s and *x*'s."

"I am sorry, my love," said Paul; "I wish I could help you out, but of course I can't drive a new horse and study a complicated price-list like that."

"No, dear; of course not," said Adèle; "I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to worry you. We'll wait till we get to that town—what did he say was the name of it?—where he said you could lay in supplies?"

"Brockham," said Paul. "Yes; we must get there before dinner."

Adèle's eyes were still fixed on the puzzling characters of the price-list.

"I hate to bother you, dear," she began; "but I do wish you would tell me if this can be possible. If *Hzz* on the dinner-pails means that they cost \$1.02 a dozen, how can we retail them at two for five cents? And yet that certainly is what *Nx* means. And if *Nx* is right, then the soap dishes must be worth—let me see!—\$3.25 apiece."

"I don't know, dear," said Paul. "I'll work it all out when we get to Brockham."

He said this with something that sounded faintly like a groan.

"You aren't feeling ill, are you, Paul?" Adèle anxiously inquired.

"Oh, not in the least, I assure you," answered Paul.

"I should *hate* to have you feeling poorly just as we were going to have such fun," said Adèle. "How clever it was of you, Paul, to think of buying this horse and wagon!"

"I?" said Paul, with a little start; "I don't think it was my idea at all, my love."

"Oh, dear, yes!" said Adèle; "I could never have thought of anything half so bright. It was just an inspiration. Just like your thinking of this whole runaway trip. Now, I never should have been capable of that."

"Oh, yes, *dear!*" Paul groaned in open desperation. "Of course I do—only I—really, my dear, this horse makes me so nervous that I can't talk."

"Why didn't you tell me, dear? Of course I won't bother you for a moment. I'll put away that wretched price-list, and I'll just make out a little memorandum of the things we've got to get at Brockham."

So she took out her little memorandum-book and her gold pencil, and began contentedly jotting down and figuring away. And as Paul watched her—which he could readily do, for, as a matter of fact, he was an old hand with horses, and a fearless driver—and saw how contented and happy the little woman was, and heard her humming bits of tunes softly to herself, his own

spirits began to brighten, and he felt less self-reproachful. He certainly had bought, if not a pig in a poke, a horse in a golden haze; and most assuredly he and his wife were somewhat out of their natural place, seated upon the top of a tin-peddler's wagon. But, after all, he reflected, the horse and the wagon were both good of their kind, even if they were not the magic outfit that they had seemed to him in a moment of enchantment; and as for being out of place, why, what was his object and his wife's at the present moment, but to get out of their natural place, and to get into somebody else's? Of course it was absurd, but evidently Adèle was happy, and if Adèle was happy, why shouldn't he be happy? and if they both were happy, why should they care about the absurdity of the happiness?

"Did you get the blankets down, dear?" he inquired, looking over Adèle's memoranda.

"Bless me, no!" cried his wife, with a merry little laugh. "I have put down sheets, though, and we shan't need sheets a little bit, shall we? People always camp out in blankets, don't they? And then I suppose our class of people use them all the time, any way, and do without sheets."

"Our class of people?" repeated Paul.

"Yes; tin-peddlers," Adèle explained innocently. And when Paul saw how deep a plunge his wife had made into her new identity, he promptly dived in after her, and immediately felt perfectly happy and quite at his ease.

"No more cigars for me," he said; "I'll buy

a pipe at Brockham and smoke it. I used to smoke a pipe when I was working with Ernest—a stubby little brier-wood pipe.”

“How delightful!” chirped Mrs. Brown. “Let me put it down: One brier-wood pipe,—Oh, Paul, how do you spell brier? I’ve got it b-r-i-r-e, and it doesn’t look right at all.”

And so conversing, they came to Brockham.

Now, Brockham, from its name, you might take to be a solid old substantial English sort of place, a small city, perhaps; or, at least, a large town with an old manor-house concealed somewhere about its corporation. If you went to look it up in the Gazetteer you would expect to see Brockham put down something like this:

BROCKHAM.—County seat, Brockham County, settled abt. 1712. pop. 8,500. large woolen manufacturing industries. 8 schools, incl. Normal College. Pleasantly situated on w. bank Brock River. chs. 3 prot. episc. 2 cong. 1 meth. 1 r. c. Brockham contains many fine residences, and has an interesting Revolutionary history.

That’s what Brockham sounds like, doesn’t it? Well, Brockham was a country-store at a lonely crossroads near an extensive swamp connected with a small creek; an abandoned toll-gate and the shopkeeper’s weather-worn white house a hundred yards down the highway. That was all there was of Brockham, beginning and end and all, for it lay in the bottom of a valley, and you could see over the level lowland for ten miles in every direction.

It was just noon when they reached Brockham

and looked at each other in disappointment and surprise; for, without having said anything at all to each other, they had made up their minds as to what they expected Brockham to be, and it certainly was not anything of the sort.

On the verandah in front of the store sat a stout man in a chair tilted back, with his feet cocked up against a pillar. He was a pleasant-looking man, not a countryman; a business man from a large city, apparently, to judge from his well-kept appearance, his well-cut suit of tweed, and the well-trimmed mutton-chop whiskers that ornamented his otherwise clean-shaven face. He got up as soon as they came abreast of the store, stepped forward with an agreeable smile on his broad face, and gave them greeting.

"Good afternoon," he said; "let me hitch your horse. Here's a chain."

"Good afternoon, Mr. ——" Paul glanced up at the sign—"Mr. Robinson."

"My name's not Robinson," said the stout man, genially; "Mr. Robinson's to dinner. I'm a friend of his, and I'm just tending store for him while he's away. Let me help your lady." And he gallantly handed Adèle down from her high perch. Then he turned to Paul.

"Guess Robinson's stocked up on tinware," he said, looking at Paul as if he were surprised that Paul shouldn't know it.

"Oh—oh—I—only—of course," stammered Paul. He had forgotten that he was a tinware peddler.

"The fact is," he explained, "I am not here to sell to-day. I want to buy some things of Mr. Robinson."

"Why, certainly," said the stout man. "Might have known it; might have known it. You're in the retail line yourself, aren't you? How do you find business?"

"Not very good," said Paul, who had recovered himself. And Adèle looked at him admiringly.

"Oh!" said the stout man. "Nice outfit you've got there. Been long on the road?"

"Not very," said Paul.

"Oh!" said the stout man again. "Nice wagon you've got there. May I ask who made that wagon?"

"I couldn't tell you," Paul answered him, truthfully. "I bought it second-hand."

"Wouldn't have thought it," said the stout man, in a complimentary tone. "Looks most as good as new, don't it? Well, come right in. I'll see if I can hunt up Robinson."

"I thought you said he had gone to dinner," said Paul.

"May be he ain't got started yet," the stout man suggested. "Step right in, any way, and we'll see. Perhaps he's in the back shop. Come right this way."

The front shop was a large room nearly filled with every kind of merchandise. There were barrels of sugar and flour and oil, a hogshead of molasses, boxes of tea and coffee and rice

and raisins and candles and all manner of things; there were calicoes and flannels and fancy notions and boots and shoes and ribbons and cheap jewelry and chairs and mops and pails and tin and china-ware and hardware and agricultural implements and a couple of sewing machines and men's clothing and a few toys, and regiments upon regiments of canned goods arrayed in order upon the shelves. It was an interesting collection, and Adèle wanted to linger and examine it, but their stout friend ushered them through this palace of delights, and with a politeness that could not be denied, led them into the back room, over the door of which was a small sign: HAY, FEED, LIME, PAINTS, OILS AND PUTTY.

As they followed him, the stout gentleman, in his anxiety to be civil, thrust the door open so wide that it struck against a bag of meal on a shelf and sent a shower of dust over both of the Browns.

"Oh, *my* Gracious!" cried the stout gentleman in dismay. "Ain't I a big butter-fingers? I ought to have thought before asking the lady to come into such a place as this. I expect I've just about ruined your lady's hat. Step right back, and let me brush you off!"

They both assured him that it was of no consequence, but the stout man was distressed beyond measure, and insisted upon repairing the damage he had caused. He went behind the counter and procured a whisk-broom. Then he

deftly aided Adèle to take off her jaunty Paris hat, and he proceeded to remove the last particle of dust from it, turning it over in his hands and flicking at it with his own white handkerchief, as tenderly as a young mother might brush an excess of powder from the face of her first baby.

"My!" he said, "I wouldn't have had this happen for a farm, but I always was the awkwardest! My old mother used to say, when I was a boy, that some folks was all thumbs, but that I wasn't even all thumbs—I was all toes. Well, well! Here, sir! Now I've undone my mischief, as far as I can, for your lady. Let me see what I can do for you." And, in spite of all protests, he removed Paul's Alpine hat and carefully brushed it off, even to the under side of the rim. Then he went on to bestow the same care upon Paul himself, brushing him until he almost rubbed the nap off his coat.

"Got any down your neck?" he inquired, inserting his hand in Paul's coat-collar, and whisking the brush around as though he were a barber and had just given Paul a hair-cut. "There! I guess that will do."

They both assured him that it would do, but he continued his protestations of regret, until Paul, to put him at his ease, asked him if he could not show them the things they wanted to buy, without waiting for Mr. Robinson. The stout gentleman said he thought he could, and he proved to be a most active and obliging

salesman. He seemed very much interested in their purchases, and surprised at some of them; but he did not transcend the bounds of polite inquiry, although the blankets puzzled him a good deal.

The prices at Mr. Robinson's store ruled low, and Paul was surprised to find how little he had spent when at last all their purchases were piled in a heap in the middle of the floor. But, as he gazed at the pile, he did not much wonder that the stout man was astonished at having sold such a bill of goods.

This is the list of the things they bought:

Three gray blankets,
Two red "
Six cans of sardines,
One can-opener,
Three lbs. candles,
One can of axle-grease (the wheels of the wagon had squeaked),
One wrench (the stout man's suggestion. It began to dawn upon Paul that when he bought the wagon he had not specifically included the fittings and other appurtenances in the purchase.),
One iron-kettle and one frying-pan ("so nice for camping out," Adèle observed),
One gross matches (suggested by the preceding purchase),
One tin lantern (Paul had forgotten that he dealt in tin lanterns himself),
One gallon kerosene oil (Paul's own bluff, after the lantern episode),
One paper pins, assorted sizes,
Six paper needles,
Six spools cotton thread, Nos. 40—70,
One box paper collars (bought for curiosity),
One pound molasses candy,
One nose-bag for the horse (stout man's suggestion again),
One lady's veil (green barège was the fashion in Brockham),
One Paisley shawl,
Two rubber overcoats,

Two knives and forks (Adèle reminded Paul that they had their own tin plates),
One compass,
Two straw hats,
One quarter-pound pepper,
One bag salt,
One " hominy,
One " Indian meal,
One jug molasses,
One brier-wood pipe (at least, it was a pipe, and it was made of wood),
One pound cut-plug tobacco,
One bottle gargling oil (for man and beast).

The stout man helped them to load all the things on their wagon, and with considerable interest inquired their destination, and gave them directions as to the best road to take. They had been told to turn to the right at Brockham, and to go a mile up the side road to a tavern, where they could get their dinner, but when the stout man heard of this he strongly dissuaded them.

"It's a quarrymens' eating-house," he said, "and a pretty rough place. I wouldn't take the lady there."

"We might cook our own dinner," said Adèle.

"Of course you might," said the stout man, cordially, "and there's an elegant place to do it, in a patch of woods, under a hummock, about two mile up this very road."

So the stout man sold them some bacon and crackers (they ought to have thought of crackers before), and butter, and six eggs and a pint of milk, and a pound of tea and a pound of coffee, which they had also forgotten before, and two

spoons, which came in the same category. And after Paul had remembered a feed of oats for the horse, they bade each other good-by in the friendliest sort of manner, and the Browns started up the road with their new possessions piled up on the top of their red wagon.

Before they had got as far as the white house they met a man coming along the road. It was undoubtedly Mr. Robinson, for there could hardly be another man in Brockham. It *was* Mr. Robinson. For when he saw the heap of what had lately been his property, on the top of the wagon, he stood stock still in wonderment, and then threw up his hands excitedly, and yelled to the stout man on the verandah of the store:

“Hi, there!”

But the stout man nodded back that it was all right, and Mr. Robinson, relieved of the fear that he had been robbed, but still wondering, went on toward his store, while the Browns jogged along the highway.

XI

THERE was not the slightest difficulty in following the stout man's directions. The road was straight, and the hummock he had told them of became visible—aggressively and almost impudently visible—before they had got half a mile on their way. It was not very much of a hummock, either, but it seemed to be conscious of the fact that, such as it was, it was the highest elevation for miles around, and it took advantage of the absence of real mountains to show off. It humped itself insolently against the sky, as if it said: "There ain't no hills here, only ME! There ain't no hills here, only ME!"

But when they arrived at its base they found it a friendly and pleasant sort of hummock, with a little patch of woods on one flank, and a spring in a hollow near by. The hummock itself was little more than a pile of round rocks, sparsely covered with turf and moss. On its bald top stood three lonely cedars.

"It's a regular etching hummock," said Adèle; "just the kind they have in etchings. There ought to be some sheep on top—etching sheep, you know, with pin legs."

They turned into the patch of woods, unhar-

nessed the sorrel mare, and took the opportunity of making her acquaintance. She seemed to be quite a likable little animal, and, as Adèle remarked, she showed real intelligence in the management of her new nose-bag. Having cared for the comfort of their horse, they took heed of themselves, and with their kettle and sauce-pan and some tin things from their own stock, including a tin pail which they filled with water from the spring, and the provisions they had bought at Brockham, they climbed to the top of the hummock, where they found a bright little fresh breeze blowing, and there they sat them down in the shade of the big cedars, and cooked the first meal they ever had cooked together.

The meal was, to use Paul's critical phrase in summing it up, "splendid, but spotty." They boiled three of the eggs, and three they made into an omelette. Paul made the omelette, and it was very good, for Paul and Ernest had had to learn to subsist, often for weeks at a time, principally upon omelettes and crackers. But while they were making the omelette they forgot all about the eggs in the kettle. Now, a camp-fire kettle, as a rule, will not boil much under an hour, and if you are not firm and profane with it, it will sometimes take an hour and a quarter. But they had put the eggs in when they had put the kettle on, and, out of the pure natural cussedness of kettles, it boiled right up as soon as their backs were turned. So, when they got to them, the eggs were of the consist-

ency of billiard balls; and while they were discussing ways and means of unhardening them, or at least of taking what Paul called the Bessemer quality out of them, the bacon which they had put on to fry got a little burnt, and this did not improve its original musty flavor. It was the kind of bacon that *will* not crisp, but always lies limp, like a rat's tail. The sardines, however, were excellent. On the whole, they felt quite proud of their first attempt.

When they had finished, Adèle chose a cedar and sat down with her back against it, and Paul chose one opposite it, and sat down with his back against that, and they chatted in lazy comfort.

But Paul remembered his new pipe, and, although his cigar-case was not empty, he resolved to begin without delay upon his pound of cut-plug. Breaking in a new pipe is not the most pleasant kind of smoking in the world. It's pretty sure to try a man's temper, and it certainly tried Paul's. Paul never got cross; but when his temper was tried he did get stubborn. Later in the afternoon he showed that his temper had been tried.

By degrees Paul dropped out of the conversation, but Adèle hardly noticed his absence, for she was chirping away in childlike happiness, and in perfect content with all the world, until suddenly, as she gazed out upon the pretty landscape spread beneath them, a look of surprise came into her face.

"Why, Paul," she said, "there's our stout man! Where do you suppose he's going?"

"To his dinner, I suppose," said Paul, not as pleasantly as he usually spoke.

"Then he will have to walk miles and miles and miles for it," said Adèle; "for there isn't a house anywhere in that direction."

It certainly did seem strange. The stout man was walking straight across the fields, heading apparently in the direction of nowhere. The two Browns followed his course with interest. Straight across the fields he marched, until he reached the road up which he had told them to turn. Here he climbed upon the top rail of a fence and sat down.

"Paul," said Adèle, "I do believe he's waiting for us."

"Then let him wait," said Paul. "No; on second thoughts I'll accommodate him. He probably wants to ask a few more questions of us."

"Well?" inquired Adèle.

"Well," said Paul, "he can ask."

And Paul buttoned up his coat, picked up the heavier cooking utensils, and started down the hill with a certain expression of stolidity and a fixedness of purpose about his walk and carriage which Adèle had noticed once or twice before, notably on the occasion when he told her that he wanted her to be his wife, and on another occasion when he told her that the twenty-seventh flat they had visited was the last one they were going to visit.

When they had washed up the "things" they harnessed the mare, who seemed quite glad to see them, and resumed their journey, discussing, as they gradually approached the place where they could see the stout man still awaiting them, a suitable name for their steed. They were hesitating between "Sorrellina" and "Tinniana" when the fat man hailed them.

"Say," he called out cheerily, "give us a lift?"

"Why, certainly," said Paul, with his shoulders still looking uncommonly square.

"I ain't a tooth-pick exactly," said the stout man, as he climbed up with an agility that could hardly have been expected of him, "but you've got a pretty broad seat here, and I guess it will *just* about hold three."

The seat proved to hold three, though not very comfortably, and the stout man could not help recognizing the fact.

"Kind of crowded, ain't it?" he said. "Well, well, I won't bother you very long—not if you're the kind of people I take you to be. Fact is," he said in a fatherly, confidential sort of tone, "I've been wanting to have a little talk with you two people ever since I set eyes on you. Wouldn't have thought it, would you?"

"Not in the least," said Paul, from between his shoulders.

"Thought not, thought not," said the stout man, looking first at Paul and then at Adèle, for he had settled himself between them, "but

I *do*, all the same; and now I want you to understand before I begin, just to clear away any misunderstandings or doubts or suspicions or anything of that kind, that I'm your *friend*. Understand that? I ain't talking here in any capacity but that of a friend. I'm your friend," he said, laying one large hand on Paul's knee, "and your lady's here," and he rested the other large hand lightly on Adèle's knee; "and it's as a friend that I ask you to answer me just two questions—just two, understand. And if they seem to you improper, why, don't answer them. But I think they are such as one man may ask of another, and in that light I would like to have you answer them."

"If they are such," said Paul, "as one man may, in my judgment, ask of another, I shall certainly be most happy to answer them."

"Just so," said the stout man, pleasantly; "in your judgment. Of course. Quite right. If, in your judgment, they're proper, you'll answer them. And if, in your judgment, they ain't proper, why, you won't answer them. That's the way I like to hear a man talk. Well, now, question number one: What may be your name and your lady's here?"

"My name," said Paul, "is Brown, Paul Brown; and this is Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Paul Brown."

"Just so," said the fat man, patting the Browns' knees with the utmost friendliness; "just so—Brown. Yes. And now—question

number two: What may be your trade, occupation or profession?"

"You can see for yourself," said Paul; "we are tin-peddlers."

"Thank you," said the fat man, with every sign of gratification and pleasure in his face. "That's all I wanted to know, and I am much obliged to you, sir, for the frank and friendly manner with which you have met me half-way."

"You are quite sure," inquired Paul, "that that is all you want to ask?"

"Quite," said the stout man, in his most agreeable manner; "quite. There ain't another question in the world I want to ask you;" and he spread out his hands to show the completeness of his satisfaction. "And now," he continued, "though you haven't asked me, and although it may be of no interest to you, yet to put us, as it were, on an equal footing, I will tell you my name. My name is Bassett. Ezra P. Bassett. At least, that's my name up here, where I was born and raised; but when I am in New York, which is my place of residence, I don't use the Ezra in my business. I just call myself Bassett—Peter Bassett."

He looked from one to the other, as if he expected them to say something. But Paul only gazed calmly ahead over the landscape, and Adèle took her cue from Paul.

"My address in New York," continued Mr. Bassett, "is No. 300 Mulberry Street."

Then he paused and looked inquiringly from

Paul to Adèle and from Adèle to Paul again. Neither spoke. Mr. Bassett again laid a large hand on the knee on either side of him.

"That," he said, impressively, "is the Central Office."

"Mr. Bassett!" said Paul, "if my wife will excuse the profanity, allow me to say to you that we do not care a damn, not a damn, what your name is or where your office is, or whether it is centrally located or not."

"Of course not," said Mr. Bassett, still cheerful and agreeable; "of course not; but, of course, just as you reserved your judgment in your own case, and quite rightly, so I'm telling you what, in my judgment, I would like to have you know about me. I have told you that I am your friend, and that still holds good when I tell you further that my business is that of a detective, and I am attached to the staff of Inspector Byrnes, of whom you may or may not have heard. But understand me," and he settled his hands more firmly on the knees of the two Browns, "that it is not as a detective, but as a friend, that I am speaking to you now. And it is as a friend that I say to you: do not try to bluff me off nor to hold me off, nor to shove me off; but confide in me as a friend, and as a friend I will stand by you."

"Mr. Bassett," said Paul, "will you kindly tell me why we should confide in you, and why you should imagine that we have any occasion or any desire to confide in you?"

"Why, of course, of course," said Mr. Bassett. "Now, it's just this way: your name is Brown and your lady's name is Brown, Mrs. Paul Brown, and you are tin-peddlers."

"And why not?" asked Paul with a smile, but with his shoulders still squared.

"Because," said Mr. Bassett, "if you want to know why, tin-peddlers don't wear Dunlap hats, nor their clothes ain't made to order by Sullivan of Fifth Avenue, nor their lady's hats ain't made by Madame Hortense. And because," the detective went on, growing more kindly and genial with every moment, "I was onto you before you'd got within a quarter of a mile of Robinson's store, and I am onto you *now*. See?"

Paul smiled grimly.

"Mr. Bassett," he said, "your error is perhaps a natural one, but it is an error, nevertheless. My wife and I are not criminals, nor have we done anything that could with any possibility bring us within the province of the law. You may be surprised to find us engaged in this particular business, but if it suits us, and if we have come honestly by it, it is nobody's business but our own that we choose to engage in it. If you have any doubt about that, I shall be happy to go with you to the nearest magistrate and prove to your satisfaction, as an officer of the law, that I have purchased all that you see here as honestly as I purchased the goods you sold me some time ago. Or, if that will satisfy you, I will show you the bill-of-sale here and now."

He made a move to take out his wallet, but Mr. Bassett restrained him.

"I ain't got the first doubt of it," he said heartily. "You're a gentleman; I could see that from the start. I ain't accusing you of stealing tin-peddlers' wagons. You're not that kind; and, moreover, my young friend, I will be perfectly honest with you. I won't try to bluff you. I haven't the first idea in the world what trouble you're in; but I want to make you confide in me, that I may help you as a friend."

"I can assure you, Mr. Bassett, that we are not in any trouble at all, of any kind or description."

"I know, I know," said Mr. Bassett; "of course not. And I don't expect you to believe in me right at once. I know just how it is. I know just how you look at it. You say to yourself, 'this man here is a detective. It's his business to get people into trouble. He just wants to worm himself into our confidence, and then, when he has wormed himself in, he'll turn right around on us, and give the whole thing away. We'll keep our mouths shut and won't let him know anything'—that's what you say to yourself, isn't it? Of course, quite natural. That's the way that people who don't know anything about it think of a detective. They think he's all the time trying to get people into trouble. Well, now, my young friends, there never was a greater mistake. A good detective, who knows his business, gets more people out

of trouble than he ever gets into trouble. You may not believe that, but it's true; and it's a credit to human nature that it is true."

"Is a detective's time very valuable?" inquired Paul.

"Sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't," replied Mr. Bassett, smiling affably. "Mine ain't, just at present, because I'm taking a vacation. But I'll tell you about that later on. I want to free your mind from this delusion you've got about detectives. Now, it's this way: you read in the papers about Detective So-and-so arresting a young man who's gone wrong, and that's all you think of. But do you ever think," continued Mr. Bassett, bringing his fist down hard on Paul's knee, "of the young fellows who have gone wrong, that that detective *hasn't* arrested?—that he's taken from evil ways, that he's rescued from desperate courses, that he's stopped right on the ragged edge of suicide, may be, and restored to the bosom of their families? No, you don't; and why not? Because you don't know about it. There's ten such cases to every one case that goes to prison. But the public never hear of them, and so they go about thinking that a detective ain't got any insides to him, and that his whole walk in life is to get nice young fellows into jail. Is that just to the detective? Is that Christian-like, I ask you? Is that kind?"

Mr. Bassett had become quite warm in his defense of the unfortunate detective; but his

manner again grew persuasive as he recommenced.

"Then, moreover," he remarked, hopefully, "I'll bet a hat, yes, sir, the best hat in New York, that you're taking this thing altogether too seriously. You magnify it; you make too much of it. I know how it is with young people. They always think that any trouble they're in is as big as all out-doors. They think there's no getting over it; there's no fixing it up. They don't know how experienced men of the world look on these things. Now, for instance, we'll take a young man, say, who's a little hard-pressed for money, and he borrows a few hundred, perhaps a few thousands, from the old man's safe when the old man ain't around—"

"Mr. Bassett," interrupted Paul, angrily, "do you mean—"

"I don't mean anything, my young friend," responded Mr. Bassett. "I'm just putting a case. Or, we'll say he forgets to make a deposit to the old man's account in the old man's bank. Or, we'll put it any way you want. Suppose he gets in some way tangled up with the banking-system. Or, perhaps he ain't tangled up with the banking-system at all, and he's only married a lady—an elegant lady, a perfect lady, but not *the* lady that just suits his parents. Take any one of these cases or any combination. He thinks, of course, he's in a hole. But he ain't. If he had a friend, the right sort of a friend—a discreet and experienced friend—who

would be able to go to the proper parties and talk to them in the proper way, why, sir, he'd be out of that hole before he knew where he was, and the public would never be the wiser. And he'd have a more charitable opinion of detectives all the rest of his life, that man would."

Mr. Bassett looked earnestly from one to the other of the Browns, with the expression of a fond mother coaxing a three-year-old baby to tell who stole the jam. Paul felt that it was impossible to be angry.

"Mr. Bassett," said he, smiling, "I assure you that if I were in any such position as you seem to imagine, I should not hesitate to make use of your ability and experience, but—"

"You won't, hey?" said Mr. Bassett.

"I won't," said Paul.

"Plenty of time," urged Mr. Bassett; "you ain't got to decide hastily."

"Let us close the subject," said Paul pleasantly, but firmly.

"I'd like to," said Mr. Bassett; "I'd like to. But, you see, it don't lay in my power. I'm a sworn officer of the law."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Paul, "that you are going to subject my wife and me to arrest because we've refused to tell you the details of our private business?"

"Not in the least," said Mr. Bassett, always pleasantly. "I wouldn't treat a lady like that for any consideration, to say nothing of a gentleman. Not but what I could. If I was to ask

at the next town to have you detained, detained you'd be. You can stake your life upon it. If it was only on suspicion of being lunatics. But I don't propose to take any such course. All I ask is that you shall take time to reflect, for your own good, on whether or no you will let older folks guide you in this matter, and help you out of your troubles as older folks alone can do it. And that brings me," went on Mr. Bassett, "that brings me right to the point. As I told you some time back, I am taking my vacation up here where I was born and raised, and I am spending my holiday with my mother, who, if I do say it myself, and no man has a better right to know whereof he speaks, is one of the nicest old Quaker ladies you ever laid your eyes on. Her farm is just about two miles up this road; and there is no woman in the State can beat her on hot biscuit. Now she would be delighted, *de-lighted* to entertain you, your lady and yourself—as guests, mind you, as guests—while you think about things, and make up your mind what's going to be your next move in this matter. There's a nice place out on the front porch where your lady can sit and crochet, and there's some real elegant trout-fishing in the creek behind the barn, and I can lend you a rod. A man can think while he's fishing just as well as any other time."

Paul and Adèle exchanged glances. Mr. Bassett smiled agreeably as he sat between them, but he evidently meant what he said.

"I suppose," said Paul, "there is no alternative to accepting your kind invitation."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Bassett, "you can drive on to the next town."

"Under those circumstances," said Paul, "it will give us great pleasure, Mr. Bassett, to avail ourselves of your mother's hospitality."

XII

MR. BASSETT'S mother's farm-house was certainly all that the most exacting could ask, as a farm-house. It stood high up on the hill, looking southward over the valley, and it had red barns and stables, and back of the barns and stables was a most delightful little brook, that fairly chuckled "Trout, trout, trout!" at you as far as you could hear it. And, when Mr. Bassett's mother came down the flagged walk to meet them, they certainly saw a sweet, pretty old lady, with beautiful white hair and a pleasant smile. She did not wear the strict dress of the Friends, but had on a gingham that was neat, pretty and old-fashioned, like herself.

"This here is my friend, Mr. Paul Brown, and his good lady. Mr. Brown ain't certain whether he'll continue in the tinware business or not; and I have told him that I guessed you could put them up for a day or two while he's thinking about it. What do you say, Ma Bassett?"

"Thee's always welcome to bring thee's friends here, Ezry," said his mother; "and thee's assuredly brought two with good faces," added Mrs. Bassett, as she stretched out her hands to

Adèle, and, after one look at her, kissed her in motherly fashion.

"My name's Lucretia; what does thee call thyself?"

"Adèle, Aunt Lucretia," answered Mrs. Brown, who hadn't been born in Philadelphia for nothing.

Aunt Lucretia put her arm around Adèle's waist and led her into the great kitchen in the lean-to, that smelt of pot-herbs all the year around, while Mr. Bassett and Paul went into the stable to put up the horse.

"Your mother has a very pleasant farm here, Mr. Bassett," remarked Paul.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," said Mr. Bassett. "Buckwheat here," he added, stretching out his left hand; "corn here," stretching out his right. "Wheat and rye down the road; cow-pasture over the way; sheep-pasture up on the hill above the woods; that's the old lady's kitchen garden back there behind the house, and I'll show you where the trout come in as soon as I can rig a rod."

He gave one comprehensive sweep of his big hands.

"From one son to another, father, son and grandson, for three generations," he said proudly. "And, young man, if it wasn't my walk in life to live in New York, looking after folks who get into trouble and don't know how to take care of themselves, I'd be farming here, too. Come along, sir," he said, as he led the way

back to the house, "and I'll get you that rod. This is just the kind of day when you're likely to get an elegant bite in a brook like that."

A broad hall ran through the old farm-house, from front to rear, and on the walls of this hall Mr. Bassett had hung his vacation-time treasures. There was a small arsenal of shot-guns, no less than six split-bamboo rods, and more and queerer scap-nets than even the rods accounted for, at which Paul gazed in astonishment until he caught sight of a mighty collection of butterflies in a glass case.

"Interested in entomology?" queried Mr. Bassett. "I do a little in that line, sometimes, myself. Bugs and trout—they somehow seem to go together."

Then they stepped into the kitchen, and, lo and behold! there was Mrs. Brown in a check apron, with her sleeves rolled up, and her arms deep in a pan of dough, which she was kneading under the directions of Mrs. Bassett.

"That's right," said Mr. Bassett, approvingly. "Glad to see your good lady taking right a-hold, Mr. Brown. Make her feel to home, Ma Bassett. That's the way!" He exhibited the kitchen to Paul with pride in his eye, in spite of the humility of his language.

"Plain, but comfortable," he said; "plain, but comfortable, that's our style."

Then they went down to the creek; and there Paul had to confess meekly that he had never had a rod in his hand before. Mr. Bassett was

as sincerely grieved as though Paul had owned up to entire ignorance of the Christian religion. But he at once proceeded to take this case of defective education in hand; and, before long, Paul could skitter a fly around for at least a minute-and-a-half without getting his line caught on the bushes. Mr. Bassett himself was a master-hand at casting. Hither and thither, among the most impossible boughs, over the raggedest thickets, among snags and drift-wood, his fly danced about without a moment's rest. And, all the time, Mr. Bassett, as they whipped up the creek, enlivened their progress with an uninterrupted flow of professional reminiscences, being mostly tales of erring young people who either came to all sorts of horrible grief through contumaciously refusing to confide in a friendly detective, or, by so confiding, found themselves snatched out of the jaws of danger, and saved for lives of golden fortune and universal respect.

Then Mr. Bassett caught seven small trout, and Paul caught two, and Mr. Bassett said that that made "a mess," and they went back to the farm-house.

If you were a young runaway married couple who had been half drowned the night before; and had eaten a very indiscreet breakfast and a very inadequate and indigestible dinner; and had driven all day long over a dusty road in a wagon whose redness could not make up for its inadequacy in the item of springs, and you found

yourself at the end of the day in the jolliest old farm-house that you ever dreamed of, with a dear old Aunt Lucretia to take care of you, and a most agreeable detective from the New York Central Office to tell you stories; if you had just eaten a glorious supper of brook-trout and crisp bacon, and three kinds of hot bread, and the best waffles in the world, with cinnamon and sugar on top of them, and cookies and oely-koeks and sweet pickles and cherry-pie and buttermilk; and if, after this meal, the agreeable detective had taken the male half of you aside, and unlocked a little cupboard near the chimney-piece, and introduced that male half to a bottle of such schnapps as the gold of the Indies could not buy in the Metropolis of the Western Hemisphere; and if, after all that, you strolled away, in a mild, sweet, fragrant Summer evening, when the insects were just chirping drowsily in the trees, and communed with yourselves as young married couples will—well, under these circumstances, you would probably come to the conclusion that you were doing pretty well, thank you, on the whole—wouldn't you? That is the conclusion Paul and Adèle came to.

“How long do you suppose we *can* stay here, Paul?” asked Adèle.

“I don't know, my dear,” answered Paul. “But if he's waiting for me to confess to forgery or anything of that sort—well, you know we've got a year to put in—a year less two days, to-morrow morning at six o'clock.”

“Gracious, Paul!” cried Adèle. “It seems as if we’d been away a year, already, doesn’t it? But if it was all like this it would be simply delightful.”

“Well,” Paul suggested, “I move we stay until they turn us out.”

“I move we do, too,” said Adèle. “But, oh, Paul, when we *do* have to go, remind me to get her receipt for those waffles!”

You are kindly requested to notice the growth of the first germ of home instinct in the breast of this young woman—a growth born of good waffles.

Then they stole back to the house, and, in the spacious old kitchen, Mr. Bassett and Adèle played backgammon; while Paul and the old lady chatted together: she telling him of her childhood days, when she had seen the Reservation Indians burning the hay-ricks in the valley, and dancing around the flames in all the gaudy horrors of their war-paint. And, meanwhile, the hired man, four dogs, two cats and a sick chicken slumbered placidly as near as they could get to the red-brick chimney-piece that held the shining black modern range.

And later on, Mr. and Mrs. Brown went to bed in a great high four-poster bedstead, in a great low dormer-windowed room. And, after they had chucked the feather-bed on the floor, they slept very comfortably.

XIII

THEY talked over the situation while they were dressing, next morning.

"Oh, m-m-m-m-veré," began Adèle, "I h-m-m-m-t-tell-m-m-M-f-s B-f-s-t——"

"Take those hairpins out of your mouth!" commanded Paul.

"I beg your pardon, dear," said Adèle; "*it was* rude, but I only wanted to say that I had to tell Mrs. Bassett something about how we came to be here. I didn't tell her anything you wouldn't have wanted me to, I'm sure, but when she asked me how long we had known her son, I thought I ought to explain just how he'd met us, and—and——"

"Run us in?" suggested Paul.

"I didn't know what to call it," said Adèle, "so I just said 'invited.' And she was awfully nice about it, Paul. She didn't ask a single question, but only said she was glad we had come."

"Didn't she make any comments?" asked Paul, who began to wonder if Mr. Bassett often enlivened his vacations by buccaneering for guests.

"Not then, but a little later on, when we were talking about something else, she said—I wish you could have seen the corners of her mouth when she said it, Paul—she said: 'It's Ezry's

trade to suspicion folks, and I sometimes think he's most too devoted to business.' "

"Was that all?"

"No; just before we went to bed, when she was helping me put away our things in the hall, she took up my hat and looked at it, and she said: 'I don't see what Ezry saw wrong about thee's bunnit, but if thee'd come in a bushel-basket or a golden crown I wouldn't have suspicioned thee.' "

"I guess the old lady's all right," said Paul.

"Paul, she's a *dear!*"

"So's Bassett," said Paul, remembering the schnapps. "I mean, he's a first-rate fellow if you don't have to run up against him professionally. They're both good people; and they mean well, and they are certainly treating us royally. But, really, we can't stay here. After all, you know, if you come to think of it, it's a little bit of an imposition on our part. We can't go on playing suspicious characters for our board and lodging, even if Bassett did suggest it."

"No, of course not," said Adèle, as she pulled aside the white dimity window-curtain and gazed out on the broad valley below them; all a pale, cool green under the light morning mist. "But it is so nice here! And so you're going to tell them all about us, Paul?"

"I'll be *hanged* if I am!" shouted Paul, with so much vigor that the collar-button which he was trying to put into place flew out of his fingers. "I'm as good a man as Bassett, any day; and I

don't propose to be bluffed by him or anybody else."

"But what *will* you do, dear?"

"Just go."

"But he'll detain you—at the next town, don't you know?"

"No he won't. Yesterday, I think he would have detained us, but if Bassett isn't a fool—and I think he's far from a fool—he's had a talk with his mother by this time, and he won't say 'Boo' when we tell him we're going."

"I suppose he's afraid we'd sue him for false imprisonment or damages or something, if he arrested us, and then they found out that we weren't robbers?"

"Hardly that," said Paul, doubtfully; "but then, people might have their opinion of a detective who couldn't detect any more than that, with the chance he's had."

"Oh," said Adèle, enlightened. "You think people would think it was a joke on him?"

"I think people might be inclined to regard it in that light," said Paul.

Paul's judgment proved to be correct. After breakfast—suppawm, (and that's hasty-pudding, if you're not a Dutchman: Indian-meal, what sinful folks call 'mush,') hot biscuit, flannel-cakes, boiled eggs, salt pork, brawn, (that's head-cheese,) cornbread, apple-pie, fried hominy and green tea—after breakfast Paul delivered his little

address to his host while they were inspecting the cattle, which were Holstein stock.

"Mr. Bassett," said he, "there is no use in our imposing ourselves any longer upon your hospitality; nor is there any use in your concerning yourself for our welfare. I'm not going to reconcile my present occupation with my choice of a hatter, to please you or any man. But I can assure you that the worst trouble I have ahead of me is that of saying good-by to you and Mrs. Bassett. And that, I am sorry to say, I shall have to do to-day; for, as you may observe," and he pointed to the red wagon, "I have a rather large stock of tinware on hand, and I want to get to work and peddle it off."

"Well, well," said Mr. Bassett, as he took Paul's hand and pressed it thoughtfully, "well, well, I am right glad to hear—not that you're going away—I'll be sorry for that, and Ma Bassett will be sorry for it—but that you're going away without any *trouble* ... or *worry* ... or *apprehension* ... or *alarm* ... or unpleasant or disagreeable or inconvenient outlook of any kind *what—so—ever*." Mr. Bassett made this speech with great deliberation, and with considerate pauses, lingering on each suggestion of a possible cause for discomfort, as though he were giving Paul a last chance to seize on some word for a text for a full confession. But Paul confessed nothing, and Mr. Bassett sighed gently as he released his guest's hand.

"Well," said Paul, "I guess I'll hitch up."

“No, no, you won’t,” said Mr. Bassett. “No; you won’t do anything of the kind! Now that everything’s settled, and we ain’t got any business on our minds, we’ll just go fishing. Tinware trade must be slack just now; most families must be pretty well tinned up, and you can just as well as not afford to take a few days off. You’ve got the makings of a fisherman in you, and I’ll bring them out.”

Paul felt obliged to decline this invitation, for he knew that he could not afford to trifle with the first glow of his enthusiasm in the tinware business. It was a tender thing, and might fleet away before his eyes. But he soon saw that it was a matter of delicacy with Mr. Bassett, and that his recent captor would esteem highly the favor of playing his host in a non-professional capacity. So he finally compromised, and agreed to stay to dinner, and to spend the morning whipping the trout-stream, with his entertainer. When this was settled, a pained look departed from Mr. Bassett’s face, and they went after their rods.

After dinner—I do not think I will say more about their dinner bill-of-fare, except that it was bewildering—they found it very hard parting from their new friends. You see, these two young people had swung out of their own orbit, and had impinged upon a Home, and there was a great attraction set up right off, so that they hated to tear themselves away. There is a good deal of difference between a Home and the reddest of Wagons.

They had got their chariot out of the barn, and their sorrel mare hitched up, when Ma Bassett asked them to wait a minute, and she and Ezra went back into the kitchen. Paul was standing at the horse's head, and Adèle noticed a peculiar look come into his face. Now Adèle was the only person in the world who knew that Paul had possibilities of being mischievous, and she at once asked:

"Paul, what are you thinking about?"

"I was only thinking," said Paul, "that I might ask Bassett if he wanted anything in the tinware line."

"You shan't do anything of the sort," said Adèle, "after they've been so good to us. But I'll tell you what you might do, and it would be *awfully* nice. Come here, I want to whisper to you."

Five minutes later Paul presented himself at the kitchen door, staggering under the burden of a large assortment of tinware, selected by Adèle, of which he begged Mrs. Bassett's acceptance. And Mrs. Bassett after a while accepted it, and she gave him her blessing, while Mr. Bassett put a great package wrapped up in brown paper into the red wagon, and there was no end of good-byes, and then the Browns drove off up the dusty road.

It was a beautiful Summer afternoon, and their road wound its way up the hillside by easy grades.

It was warm; but there were little refreshing puffs of breeze every now and then; and the two Browns sat up on their high perch and enjoyed the day and the drive and their own company and the slow, gradual, happy digestion of their dinners. The little sorrel mare had completed the digestion of *her* dinner, and now she tried to show that she felt her oats, and was duly grateful therefor, by switching her tail, snorting, and from time to time trying to introduce a sort of skip, or hitch-and-kick combination into her regular trot. But the tranquil condition of joy which enfolded the Browns grew more and more like simple old-fashioned slumber, until, late in the afternoon, as the sun was beginning to settle down in the western sky, Adèle suddenly gave a nervous start, grasped her husband by the arm, and gazed in his face with a look of horror.

"Paul," she cried, "do you know what we've done?"

"N—No," said Paul, who wasn't quite awake yet; "I didn't know we'd done anything."

"That's just it," said Adèle, impressively. "What have we done? Nothing; absolutely nothing."

"I don't understand you at all, my dear," said Paul, desperately puzzled. "First you say we have done something, and then you say we haven't done anything."

"Paul Brown," said Adèle, with tragic solemnity, as she held up the price-list before him and pointed with her fore-finger to the line:

"*Lxx*—33 $\frac{1}{3}$ —10—2, 1 off for cash *Zmx* net. 30 days."

"What did we start out to do? To sell tinware! At farm-houses! Now look there!"

She made Paul turn and look down the long expanse of gently sloping hillside up which they had been climbing all the afternoon. They could see the road back of them for miles and miles, bordered right and left by a continuous succession of thriving farms, every one of which might have contained at that moment some faithful housewife with a heart half breaking for a new outfit of tinware.

They gazed in silence, but Adèle's lips moved softly. She was counting.

"There are twenty-three of them," she said at last, "not including the flagman's little house at the railroad crossing."

"I don't think he'd want anything in our line," said Paul, snatching at a crumb of comfort.

"You can't tell," Adèle corrected him with severity. "He might want—a tin cup—or a cuspidor—we have both."

"Well," Paul suggested, somewhat feebly, "there are plenty more farm-houses left."

"They can never take the place of those farm-houses to me," said Adèle. "They are twenty-three opportunities lost, and something makes me feel *sure* that every one of them would have bought something. The very next house we come to," she concluded sternly, "you must sell them something, even if you have to sell it at a sacri-

fice. I don't mean to go to sleep to-night without saying we really have peddled."

Paul shook his head doubtfully.

"We are getting pretty near the top of this hill, or mountain, or whatever you call it," he said, "and I don't believe we'll come across any more houses until we get over into the next valley. I don't think anybody lives up here."

But Paul was mistaken. A turn in the road suddenly brought them in sight of a house, at least a sort of house—the sort of house that somehow always seems to get into picturesque situations on mountain-tops and in other desirable pieces of scenery—a perfectly plain, square, frame-house, with about as much architecture to it as a shoe-box stood on end. A thin, gaunt woman, with a forbidding face, sat in the doorway. She had a wooden platter in her lap, and was viciously hashing something. Paul objected strongly to making her his first customer.

"Anyone who would build a house like that in a place like this doesn't deserve to have tin," he said. "I don't believe that woman knows what tin is. She probably uses galvanized iron, or some such thing as that."

But Adèle would not listen to him.

"No, Paul; it is business; and you must sink your prejudices. Take her this saucepan—I suppose she fries *everything*—and see if you can sell her anything else."

So Paul resignedly took the saucepan, and leaving Adèle in the wagon, marched off to the

house. He was gone about three minutes. When he returned, his face was very red. He put the saucepan back in the wagon, climbed to his seat without saying a word, and started up the horse.

"What was the matter, Paul?" asked Adèle.
"Wouldn't she buy the saucepan?"

"No," said Paul.

"What did she say, Paul?"

"She said she didn't want any saucepans."

"Was that all?"

"No," said Paul.

"What else did she say?"

"She asked me if I sold boilers."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her, 'yes.'"

"Well?"

"Then she asked the price."

"And you told her?"

"Yes."

"And then what did she say?"

"She asked me where I'd buried the tin-peddler."

"Oh, Paul! What could you have told her?"

"I told her correctly. I remembered about the boilers, because the price was marked on them. I said, 'fifteen cents.'"

"Oh, Paul, dear, will you never learn?" cried Adèle. "Fifteen cents for a great big wash-boiler, the largest thing we have in the wagon!"

"Big?" repeated Paul, in a dazed way. "A boiler big? Why I thought—" here a sudden

light broke in on him—"Great Scott, Adèle!" he shouted, "I was thinking of *strainers*."

"Oh, you dear stupid boy!" said Adèle. "What a goose! Well, you'll have to drive back and explain to her. You can say you're absent-minded, or something of that sort."

"My dear," said Paul, "I wouldn't go back and face that woman again for all the tinware in the civilized world!"

XIV

THEY drove on for ten minutes before Paul spoke again, evidently at the end of a long train of thought.

"Now, Bassett," he said, just as if Adèle had been following him all the time; "Bassett would never have done that. Mr. Bassett certainly had his suspicions, there's no use denying it. But he knew I wasn't a horse-thief."

Adèle smiled behind her hand to see the conqueror of the mighty Bassett thus cast down by a lone lorn woman.

"My dear," she said, "*nobody* in the *world* would take you for a horse-thief. That old creature has probably lived up here all alone until she is half crazy."

This reflection seemed to cheer Paul up immensely; and, being reminded, by the mention of the name of Bassett, of the fat parcel that their late hosts had given them, they hauled it forth and examined it. It was a characteristic Bassett bundle. Its big folds contained four Spring-chickens deliciously broiled, several kinds of pie, some dairy-cheese and pot-cheese, slices of cold ham, a little bottle of mustard, a paper "screw" of pepper and salt, and a small flask of the unapproachable schnapps.

The realization of the fact that they were hungry, which somehow came to them with the sight of these good things, brought them face-to-face with another exciting and interesting truth—they were about to camp out for the first time, and to sleep in their own wagon. This put them suddenly into a new flutter of life. Speaking in a general way, their situation was admirably adapted to this end; for, as Adèle remarked, there wasn't a soul within miles, except the old woman, if she could properly be called a soul. The only thing they had to do was to find water, for they had quite forgotten to bring any with them. Fortunately, they were not long in discovering a little creek, almost dried up, but with a thin thread of water still trickling among the hillside rocks. Near by there was a patch of dry mountain grass, where they tethered Sorrellina or Tinnianna—for the choice of her name still hung in the balance. They would have liked to push on to the top of the hill while it was yet light, but, as the little creek rose in a neighboring bog, they concluded that it was best to stay near the base of supplies. So, when the animal with the glut of names had been made comfortable, they began to build their fire. This was rather a tedious operation, for there seemed to be very little dead wood. Paul might have cut some fat pine knots, but he had forgotten to provide himself with a hatchet or a saw, when he was sampling the stock of Mr. Bassett's friend. His entire tool-chest consisted of a can-

opener and a monkey-wrench, and was frankly and shamelessly inadequate to the situation.

Paul's back was beginning to ache with stooping down, when he heard Adèle call him. She had climbed to the top of a little rocky eminence somewhat further up the mountain-side, and there he followed her.

"Oh, Paul!" she said; "if we could only have *that*, how it would burn!"

She pointed to a large sign, made of boards that had once been neatly painted, but now so sun-scorched and weather-beaten that it was not quite easy to make out the lettering, which was as follows:

DESIRABLE BUILDING LOTS
and
ELEGANT VILLA SITES.
LOCATION UNSURPASSED—
ALL MODERN IMPROVEMENTS.

"But, of course," she went on, "it belongs to the owner of the lots, and so we mustn't touch it."

"It is a living lie," said Paul. "Stand aside, my dear."

He raised a large round stone above his head, and sent it crashing down upon the sign. Then, silently and firmly gathering up the splintered fragments, he bore them to the creek-side, and

in five minutes the poor old sign was expiating its iniquity in dancing flames. Then they made tea, and fried a little bacon, just for the sake of frying something; and, after they had made an excellent meal, they sat down with their backs against a boulder, Paul to smoke his pipe, and Adèle to give him a lesson in the price-list.

But the pipe was beginning to grow black and sweet and highly enjoyable; and the price-list had long ceased to be anything but the abomination of desolation mentioned in the scriptures, and by-and-by they contented themselves with simply sitting there and watching the sunset, which was making a series of beautiful transformation scenes away down at the lower end of the valley.

Their camping-ground was a little above the winding road up which they had been traveling, and they looked down upon it as they sat against the rock. It was a lonely road, narrow and ill-cared for, and they were greatly surprised when they saw a curious little figure climbing up it. Adèle drew a little closer to Paul.

"Oh, Paul!" she whispered; "it can't be—tramps!"

"I think not," said Paul; "in fact, I am sure. It's only a boy, and he's carrying a bundle."

But Adèle continued to look rather nervously at the dark figure until it came fully into view in the bright sunset light. Then she gave a little sigh of relief and an apologetic laugh.

"How absurd!" she said. "Why, it's only

a little Italian boy—and, oh, Paul, dear, do look at what he's carrying!"

The boy was a brown-skinned youngster, thirteen or fourteen years old, with dark, curly hair; and he was bent almost double under the weight of a great burden of tinware which he carried on his back—a poor little outfit compared with the Browns', but still a heavy load for a half-grown boy to carry. Yet he trudged cheerily along, whistling and keeping step to his own music; and, as he passed them, he hailed them in a happy, childish voice:

"Buona sera!"

"Buona sera!" Paul answered him. And, as the little figure vanished up the road, Adèle called softly after him:

"Buona sera!"

But, as he passed on, they turned to each other with troubled faces.

"Oh, Paul," said Adèle, "wasn't it pitiful? Such a load, and yet such poor little wretched things!"

"Yes, *by Jove!*" said Paul, knitting his brows.

Then they sat in silence until the light had almost faded from the western sky.

"Oh, Paul," said Adèle, at last, with a long-drawn sigh and a shake of her little head, "I am so thankful we forgot those farm-houses!"

"Well, dear, we must go to bed," said Paul, after a long silence.

"Yes; in our wagon!" said Adèle, brightening up, for the little Italian boy had really

weighed heavily upon her mind. "Oh, Paul, won't it be fun!"

And they very soon forgot their small competitor in the tinware business, for they found that going to bed in the wagon was quite a complicated and protracted piece of work. In the first place, they had to take all their stock out of the wagon in order to get in themselves; and then, when the stock was all out, they remembered the evening dew, and were obliged to consider that the tinware would surely rust if it were left all night on the damp grass.

However, by this time they had grown quite fertile in expedients, and, the night being warm, Paul took one of their blankets and fastened it by each of its four corners to the wagon-springs. Into this he piled all of their stock, and over this again he spread another blanket, and so tucked up the tinware for the night. They had now three blankets remaining, and two of these Paul spread on the floor of the wagon, keeping the other to cover them. Then Adèle climbed into the hollow box of the wagon to see how she liked their new sleeping quarters.

Her report came out to Paul with a hollow, booming sound, as though she were lost in a distant cavern. She said, first, that it was dark; and then she said that it was too hard for anything. So she climbed out again, and Paul proceeded to despoil the tinware of its upper blanket. Adèle tried it once more, and said that it was better, but that she wished they had thought to

get a mattress. Then they both climbed in and tried to settle themselves for the night.

But Adèle had a tender conscience and a deep sense of responsibility.

"Paul," she said, "I cannot sleep while I think what would happen to that tinware if any dew got on it. I do wish you'd try and think of something else to do with it."

So Paul got up somewhat reluctantly, and devised another expedient. This time he piled all the tinware on top of the wagon, over their heads, and covered it with its blanket.

"Oh, thank you, dear!" said Adèle, when he came back.

"You're entirely welcome, dear," replied Paul, but hardly in his very pleasantest voice. "Do you think you could get just the least little bit over that way?"

"I'll try, dear," said Adèle; "but there isn't very much room, you know. Are you going to shut the door, Paul?"

"I can't, dear," said Paul; "somehow my feet seem to stick out."

"I'm so sorry, dear," said his wife. "Do you suppose we could have an extension put on?"

"A—what?" said Paul, sleepily. "I tell you they're too *long*."

"I didn't mean your feet, dear," said Adèle. "I meant an extension to the wagon."

"Oh, yes!" Paul groaned; "certainly—just as you please, my dear—in the morning."

Then they tried to sleep. But the floor of

the wagon had something to say about that. It made itself felt even through three thicknesses of blanket, and it proved to be a singularly hard, unyielding floor. Paul drowsily wondered if he couldn't some time have it taken out, and a spring-board substituted. He was just sleepy enough to make this plan seem quite feasible, and he turned over on his back to think of it more comfortably. In doing so his elbow landed heavily upon his wife's head, while at the same time he thrust her violently against the side of the wagon.

"Oh, Paul!" cried she, "you're *killing* me! How could you be so cruel? And just as I was getting off to sleep so nicely, too!"

This last clause was a fib. But the best woman in the world, when she has got a man down, *will* rub it into him. Paul apologized profusely, but not in a very clear or connected manner. Then he tried to efface himself against his side of the wagon, and he only gave a subdued moan of pain when, shortly after, Adèle plunged both her French heels vigorously into the small of his back.

It was now Adèle's turn to apologize, and she felt so badly about it that she not only set forth her regrets at great length, but made Paul wake up to be sure that he understood how badly she *did* feel. And having once waked up, they lay awake and talked it all over. They came to the conclusion that they did not *altogether* like sleeping in the wagon as it was arranged at present.

"If," Adèle said, "it only had a spring bottom—"

"And a tail-board to let down for my feet," suggested Paul.

"And a little more ventilation—"

"And about two feet more width—"

"And if it didn't smell quite so much of the things we put in it—why, Paul, I can smell sardines, and bacon, and pepper, and tobacco, and axle-grease, and kerosene oil, and I don't know how many other things, all at once."

"If we'd built the wagon in the first place," said Paul, "it would have been all right. But I don't believe that man ever slept in this wagon."

"The wretch!" Adèle exclaimed. "Didn't he tell you he did?"

"Well, no," said Paul, "now I come to think of it, he did not. I asked him if I could sleep in the wagon, and he said I could if I bought it."

"Oh!" said Adèle.

They gave it up after a while, and decided that they did not really care about making a bed-chamber of their vehicle until certain radical faults in its construction had been remedied. They thought they would get up and take a little walk to stretch their legs and limber up the many sore points which sprang into life all over their frames.

They crawled painfully out of their box, and, when they had got out into the open air, they were astonished to find how large and cool and

generally delightful the world was. The moon shone so brightly that, for a moment, it seemed as if they were standing on a snow-clad hill near the shore of a broad white lake; for a great mist filled the valley below them, and buried in its cloudy depths the fields and farms and woodlands.

“Oh, Paul,” cried Paul’s wife, “how beautiful! I am not sleepy now, or even tired. Are you? Let’s walk to the top of the hill and look down. It must be like getting into heaven to see it all from there!”

XVI

THE road kept doubling on itself, and it was the whitest thing in the landscape, as it stretched out before them, for on each side were the black hollows beneath the bushes and the undergrowth that bordered it. Each short ascending reach lost itself in the darkness; and, though they could not have told why, it gave them a strange sort of quick, surprised pleasure to come around the turn and find that silver path leading them in just the opposite direction, and yet ever tempting them upward with its wayward beauty. At each turn they knew what they were going to find, and yet each time it was a surprise; and the road kept the best surprise of all until the last; for suddenly they came around a thicket, and there it lay before them running straight up, and over the bare brow of the hill, as if it run into the hollow of the sky. Paul felt Adèle's hand fall upon his arm, not in affright, but as though she cautioned him not to break the silence.

"Look, dear," she said very softly, pointing to the side of the road.

The little Italian boy lay there, stretched on his back, with one arm under his head and his other hand clutching at his ragged shirt and

pulling it open at his brown chest, that rose and fell in his sound, child-like sleep. His lips were relaxed in a babyish smile, and the dew glistened like frost on his curly black hair. Adèle gazed at him until the little picture blurred and wavered through tears. She slipped her hand into Paul's, and he pressed it hard.

They turned back a little, and sat down on the stones by the roadside.

"Paul," said Adèle, after a long while, "do you know what I'm thinking of?"

Paul nodded. "Give him something!"

"Yes; give him a whole lot of things. And bring them up here, don't you know, while he's asleep, and leave them for him to find when he wakes up. Wouldn't that be lovely?"

"First-rate," said Paul.

"Oh, you're such a *dear*," whispered Adèle, "to think so, too. But then, I knew you would. Now, what shall we give him?"

"A blanket, the first thing, I should think," said Paul.

"Yes; of course," Adèle said; "you're always so thoughtful, Paul. And what next?"

Paul ruminated.

"'Nother blanket," he said at last.

"I meant tinware," Adèle explained.

"Oh!" said Paul. "Well, give him the wash-boiler. I wouldn't put that thing to bed another night for a farm."

"It's a nice wash boiler, Paul," said Adèle reproachfully; "and you oughtn't to feel angry

with it because you got it mixed up with a strainer. Besides, the poor little fellow couldn't carry it."

"Well, if he won't take it any other way," said Paul obstinately, "give him the horse and wagon to carry it."

Then their eyes met. The same thought came to both at once. It was born in a jest, but it trembled into earnest before they knew it; and there they sat looking at each other and silently talking, with no need of speech to make each other understand. It was Adèle who first spoke aloud.

"Oh, Paul! do you think we really might—"

"Why not?" said Paul. "After all, what did we come out for except to have a good time? And I'm not so stuck on that wagon as I was."

"Oh, Paul, I won't let you say that!" cried Adèle. "You wrong yourself—you weren't thinking of that at all. We were having a lovely time with the wagon, if it *was* horrid to sleep in. But then it would have come to an end some time. And I'm sure *he'd* have an ever so much better time with it, and it would mean a great deal more to him than it would to some man who could afford to buy it from us."

"Well, I'm game," said Paul, cheerfully. "It won't leave us with much ready cash, but then I suppose we can load up again."

"You don't mean to say," Adèle exclaimed, somewhat horrified, "that we've spent all we had when we came away!"

"Pretty near," said Paul; and then he smiled at her shocked face. "You must remember, my dear, that we're only experimenting, so far. When we find out what we really want to do, we can begin to economize."

This explanation greatly relieved Adèle's soul.

"Oh, yes, of course!" she said; "and we can economize on ourselves; and then what we do for other people will be a luxury. That will be nice, won't it?"

Anything that was nice for Adèle was nice for Paul.

"Let's wake the little beggar up and tell him about it."

"Oh, Paul, how can you think of such a thing?" said his wife, holding up her hands. "Of course it's got to be a *surprise!*"

"Why, how on earth," inquired Paul, "can you surprise a fellow with a horse and wagon? You can't slip it in his pocket, or put it in his stocking."

"Don't be absurd, dear," his wife said rebukingly, "and I'll tell you just what we'll do. You'll make out a deed of gift, or whatever you call it, and we'll stick it in his pocket—"

"He hasn't got a pocket," interrupted Paul, "any more than he has socks."

"You know what I mean, Paul, perfectly well. Let's come right along and do it."

So Paul obediently came along, and they retraced their steps to the camping-ground.

For one moment, as they gazed at the embers

of their camp-fire, in which a little life yet lingered; at Sorrellina (or Tinnianna) waking from her placid dreams to cast a look of friendly inquiry toward them; at the tinware cosily put to bed under its blanket, and at the wagon, which, even under the moonlight, retained something of its peculiarly red redness—for one moment a pang smote them both at the thought of giving it all up; but they did not falter.

Adèle began to pack their own personal handbags while Paul got out his bill-of-sale, and started out to make a transfer in something calculated to suggest a legal form. But here, at the very beginning, he struck upon a snag.

"I'm afraid, my dear," he said, after scratching his head in silence for a while, "that I've got to wake that little cuss up. How the deuce can I transfer this thing to him if I don't know his name?"

Adèle knit her brows in thought.

"Couldn't you write it so badly that nobody could read it? and then they couldn't say it *wasn't* his name, you know."

"I might do that," said Paul; "but there ought to be enough of a name for him to recognize himself by."

"That's true," said Adèle. "I don't see how we're going to get around that."

"I'll tell you," said Paul. "Don't you know what an everlasting lot of names those foreigners always have? Well, let's give him all we

can think of, and then we'll be pretty certain, among them all, to strike on the right one."

So they made out the transfer with all the Italian names they could think of, ending with an illegible scrawl. Some of the names they put in, not at all because they thought they might belong to the boy, but because they sounded pretty. This is what the result of their collaboration looked like:

Paolo Giuseppe Matteo Marco

Luca Giovanni Luigi

Innocente Geronimo Carlo

Maria Ernesto Crisostomo

Ferdinando Giulio

Tommaso Pio Tito Antonio

Chiaro

de Lorenzo

de Lorenzo

When they had finished, they regarded their work in admiration.

"I always *was* a bad writer," said Paul, proudly.

"Yes, dear," said Adèle, very much pleased; "but I never thought you could write as badly as that."

Paul put the tinware and the stores back into the bedroom. As the moon went down, he was obliged to light the lantern, which added a gypsy-like attraction to his work, and he dawdled over it until Adèle was obliged to remind him that the sun would be up if he lingered much longer.

But the eastern horizon was still cold and gray, and the moon had not faded in the sky, when they drove the mare up as near to the place where the sleeping boy lay as they thought they could safely advance without waking him. There they tethered her, warmly blanketed, and up the road they went and found the boy still sleeping. He had scarcely moved since they left him.

Adèle had written a little note in such Italian as she had learned—and taught—at Madame Chambray's school, to explain the situation, and to advise him as to the moderate and appropriate use of such portion of his new name as he might find convenient for business purposes. And if any one were to endeavor to take his property from him, he was to address Mr. Parkins, at the nearest of the banks of deposit where Paul had provided a *cache* for that creature of his own imagination.

Then they went back to say a last farewell to

the outfit that had been theirs; and Paul patted Sorrellina's neck, and Adèle stroked Tinnianna's nose; and that team of one single horse ate of a bush, and manifested no emotion.

There was nothing left now but to give Paolo Etcetera his little packet of papers, which they had tied up with the price-list. Paul stooped down and slipped it under the grimy hand that lay upon the brown breast. The small fingers slightly closed upon it, and the boy breathed the light sigh of contented sleep. Adèle knelt down by his side.

"Paul," she whispered, "do you think I'd wake him?—"

"No," said Paul; "a child who could sleep like that must be built like a time-safe."

Adèle bent over and kissed the boy's forehead. Then she rose, and they went on their way over the brow of the hill, where another valley lay at their feet.

"I wonder ——" said Paul, dreamily.

"What dear?"

"What in thunder he'll make of the price-list," said Paul.

"Oh, Paul," said Adèle, "please don't joke!"

XVII

IT seems an easy thing to make a spring-board, run up it, and dive off into the deep water of a pleasant swimming-place. Any boy can tell you how it is done. You go to the saw-mill, shortly after the foreman has gone home to dinner, and ask permission of the back-door to take a nice, long, springy plank, with considerable "lift" to it. Then you lug it down to the water's edge, and you cock it up over a big round stone, at the proper angle over the water, and hold the shore end down with a big flat stone. Then you just stand back, take your run, and dive.

Yes. And there is a point in that run when you become conscious that you are made in two parts, and the front part of you is collapsing and tumbling right in on your rear elevation, which seems to be composed principally of air; and cold, very thin air, at that. You know you have got some pores left—several billion of them—for they are all pricking, especially those in the place where your hair used to be. Otherwise there is nothing solid about you, except a choking sensation in the throat and head, and a feeling of about-to-be-brokenness all the way up your spine. That's the point where you go back and say you didn't get the right kind of run on; and the

other boys say: "Ah, 'fraideat!" And then you run and dive, somehow. You would dive off the Rock of Gibraltar to cool off the red feeling in your cheeks.

Paul Brown had never had any experience with spring-boards at swimming-places, but he was getting the same outfit of sensations as he walked down the broad, shady main street of Greenhill Plains, on his way to the Greenhill Bank, where he was going to cash Mr. Parkins's first check.

Paul had prepared an excellent spring-board. He had made a deposit for Mr. Parkins, and he had constructed a signature for a key to that deposit, and he had notified the people of the bank that Mr. Parkins, in his wanderings in search of health, was liable to drop in on them at any moment, and to check against his deposit. And here he was in Greenhill Plains, and the Greenhill Bank was down the street, and nobody but his wife, who was at the Ontowasco House, and he himself, knew that he was not Mr. Parkins, but Paul Brown. And only he himself knew that he was not even that—he was Paul Brown in a blue funk.

It had all seemed so simple—to walk pleasantly and naturally into the bank, and to say to the Cashier: "Good morning, sir. How do you do? Allow me to introduce myself—Mr. Parkins, of New York. Beautiful town you have here—beautiful!" Then the Cashier was to say: "Mr. Parkins? Oh, yes! Mr. J. P. Parkins?"

Glad to see you, Mr. Parkins. What can I do for you this morning?" But now that the time had really come to do it, somehow all the simplicity went right out of the scheme, just as the jump goes out of the boy on the spring-board.

For the first time in his life, Paul was about to pretend to be something and somebody that he was not. For the first time in his life he was about to sign a check with a name that was not his, and to which he had no legal right. And the moment the last letter of that signature was formed, Paul Brown would belong to a class of men whom he had looked down upon all his life—the class of men who have "*alias*" after their names. Paul Brown, *alias* J. P. Parkins! And if it ever were discovered, how could he explain to all the great world that reads newspapers that he had put on that criminal's mask for no evil purpose?

He cast up his eyes, and saw that he had come to the bank. It was only a small red-brick building, and nothing in any way formidable, but Paul hurried past it as if it were the mouth of the cave of the Giant Despair. He went a few yards beyond the bank, and then he turned and retraced his steps, trying to get something like a determined sound into the soles of his shoes. This time he got a few yards beyond the bank in the other direction. He felt that he must put an appearance of naturalness on this last promenade, so he turned abruptly in a cigar-store and asked for a cigar.

“What price?” inquired the clerk.

“Oh,” said Paul, “about twenty cents.”

He was not looking at the clerk, but he felt that the clerk was looking at him, and in a very peculiar manner. If he had ever smoked the cigar that the clerk sold him for twenty cents, he might have understood why the clerk’s manner was peculiar. But he never smoked the cigar.

After this there was nothing to do but to go into the bank, and he went, thanking his stars that the day was warm enough to account in some measure for his general appearance of high fever.

Now Paul had selected the Greenhill Bank as a depository of his traveling funds because he had found that it was rated at the mercantile agencies as a small, but old, sound and respectable institution. Greenhill Plains was an old and well-known town, and he had thought that it was one that would probably support a thriving, well-established bank, wherein a strange deposit would attract no special attention. He did not know that Greenhill Plains was not only an old town, but what might be called a senile town, whose affairs had been at a stand-still for several generations; and that the one small bank of Greenhill Plains did little more than a petty money-lending business, as agent of larger institutions in other cities. Its only depositors were, so to speak, the local butcher, baker and candlestick-maker, and among theirs, Mr. Parkins’s new account shone like a diamond in a handful of bird-shot. But, as I said, he knew nothing of all this.

Paul was too nervous when he presented himself at the Paying Teller's window to take much notice of his surroundings; and, indeed, there was nothing to see, except the usual interior of a small country bank—a room divided lengthwise by a counter surmounted by a net-work of stout wire. The wire net was pierced with the two little windows which we may see in every bank—the one through which the Receiving Teller is condescending, and the one through which the Paying Teller is rude. On the one side of the railing were desks and stools, the big safe, and the one bank-official in sight—a large, gaunt, aggressive-looking young man with a prominent chin and a mouth that would have been very useful to a retriever. On the other side of the counter were Paul, two chairs, two spittoons and the *Bank Note Detector* on a broken file. At the back of the room was a half-glass door, marked "Private Office."

The bank clerk was sitting on a high stool, writing in a large book. He paid no attention whatever to Paul, until the latter, after fidgeting for a few moments, began:

"I—I—I beg your pardon—"

Then the bank-clerk turned slowly, looked at Paul with anything but a pleasant expression, turned back to his work, and slowly added up two long columns of figures. Then he carefully descended from his stool, walked to the window, and said: "Well!" so abruptly that it made Paul start.

"I—I'm Mr. Parkins," began Paul, feeling all the blood in his body go suddenly to his head, but still conscious of an inexpressible sense of relief that the fib was positively told.

"Well?" said the bank-clerk again, still more disagreeably than before.

"Mr. J. P. Parkins," said Paul.

"Well?" said the bank-clerk, so impatiently that Paul hastened to stammer on.

"I've got some money here," he said.

"So've other folk," said the bank-clerk, curtly.

"I'd like to draw about two hundred and fifty dollars," said Paul.

"How much?" the bank-clerk asked sharply.

"About two hundred and fifty dollars," said Paul, feebly.

The bank-clerk regarded him with a more stern expression than any he had so far assumed.

"Do you know," he demanded severely, "*how much money* you want to draw?"

This time Paul managed to say two hundred and fifty dollars. The clerk gave a sort of snort.

"Where's your check?" he asked.

"I haven't drawn it yet," said Paul. "I—"

"Where's your check-book;" the bank-clerk interrupted him.

"It's here," said Paul, producing it.

The bank-clerk gave him his instructions in a voice so loud that any one passing in the street must have heard every word.

"Take that pen and ink there," said the bank-clerk, "and write out a check for the amount you

want. Put the amount in writing on this line, and the figgers down there, and your name here. Top line's for the date."

And then the clerk drew back a step, and stood watching, while the millionaire Mr. Brown, his face burning red, and his heart beating so hard that his hand shook, set to work to forge the signature of Mr. J. P. Parkins.

Paul had taken the pen in his hand. He held it suspended over the paper. He was just about to bring it down to make the first down-stroke of the letter P, when he remembered that he had to make the upstroke of the letter J. For one moment of agony it seemed to him as if he could more readily lift a ton than push the point of his pen over that little quarter-of-an-inch of paper. But somehow he did it, and there was the signature of J. P. Parkins staring him in the face. He looked at it curiously, somewhat as a man might look at a corpse of his own killing; and he wondered idly if it bore the slightest resemblance to the signature which he had sent in with his deposit. The harsh voice of the bank-clerk woke him out of his daze.

"Ever drawn on this deposit before?" he asked.

"No," said Paul. He did not know why, but his heart sank within him.

The bank-clerk pushed the check back to him across the counter, and turned sharply away from him.

"You'll have to be identified," he said.

"But," said Paul, "I don't know anybody in this town."

The bank-clerk merely repeated his last words, curtly and wearily:

"You'll have to be identified."

But, at this old familiar injustice, Paul's courage began to come back to him. He explained that he had made the deposit for the very purpose of having a sum of money at his disposal in a strange place. That this had been fully understood when the deposit was received. That it was utterly impossible for him to find anybody to vouch for his identity in a town which he had never seen before in his life. That he was willing to answer any questions that might serve to identify him, and that his signature was there for comparison with the one held by the bank.

"We don't do business in that way," said the bank-clerk. But he looked at the signature, and then hunted up Paul's account in two or three big books, and found Paul's autograph on a file, and compared the two with a quick and experienced glance. It was an awful moment for Paul, but the comparison was apparently satisfactory, for the bank-clerk showed some symptoms of relenting, or, at least, of being willing to consider the matter.

"It's entirely irregular," he said. "What business are you traveling in?—sewing machines?—"

"No," said Paul; "I'm not engaged in active business at present."

He was going on to say that he was traveling for his health, but it occurred to him that he did not look like a man who was traveling for his health; and he was wondering what business he could find for himself, when the clerk helped him out. "Buying real estate?" he inquired.

"I—I may look at some," answered Paul, hastily.

The bank-clerk went to the safe, and returned with the money, which he counted out very slowly in front of Paul. It was mostly in small bills. Paul took it, and was putting it in his pocket, when he was startled by the sound of a voice speaking hastily and excitedly, but in a low tone, on the other side of the door marked "Private Office." Paul felt himself growing cold.

"What's that?" he asked, before he had time to think.

The bank-clerk had climbed back on his high stool. He did not reply to Paul's question but he did turn his head to cast one chilly glance toward him as he said:

"You'll probably find prices pretty stiff."

Paul walked toward the Ontowasco House, nursing the tail end of the bluest funk he had ever known in his life; and wondering whether he was safely through it. He did not know what happened in the bank before he had been out of it thirty seconds.

A short, fat man, with a bald head and flowing black side-whiskers, rushed furiously out of the door marked "Private Office," ran behind the

counter, and, laying violent hands upon the bank-clerk, dragged him off his high stool and shook him as few door-mats ever get shaken. All the while he sputtered forth oaths and imprecations; and the most kindly thing he said of the bank-clerk was that he was a dod-gasted dunder-headed fool jackass. The fat man literally foamed at the mouth as he shook his fist in the direction which Paul had taken.

"He'll never come back!" yelled the fat man. "That man will never come back, you feather-brained mule, do you hear that? You pudding-headed shoat, you've lost the only new customer we've had in two years, with your blamed infernal freshness. Oh, *what was* you let into this world for?"

"Why, you told me to do it!" gasped the bank-clerk, when he had time to speak. "Didn't you tell me to stand him off, and give him the impression we were doing a high-toned business and had folks like him dropping in every day? Didn't you tell me to meet him with dignity?"

"Meet him with dig-grandmother!" shouted the fat man. "I didn't tell you to jump on his neck, did I? I didn't tell you to insult him and treat him like a sack of meal, did I? I didn't tell you to make a confounded wild ass of the prairie of yourself, did I? And now he's gone, and we've lost him! Dignity! Dignity! Get out of this, you gibbering loon, and go home! You may be fit to saw wood, but you ain't fit for one other blasted thing on this green earth. Git!"

XVIII

BY the time Paul got back to the Ontowasco House he had sufficiently emerged from his blue funk to begin to look around him with an interested eye.

He found himself in the typical old town of the middle states. Greenhill Plains was eminently respectable, of a decent antiquity, conservatively lazy, well-to-do in a comfortable, provincial way, extremely aristocratic in exactly the same way, mildly pretty, thoroughly home-like, and perfectly, wholly, completely, unshakably satisfied with itself.

Greenhill Plains had one long, wide business street with four parallel lines of trees running its whole length. All around this were modester streets, and these were again circled by the residences of the rich and great of Greenhill Plains, who dwelt in spacious squat houses of brick and stone, half citified and half countrified, each standing in the very center of its ample grounds. In every place was a greenhouse, and the pattern of the greenhouse was an index of the owner's social character. The old conservative people of the town had greenhouses with brick foundations and sloping glass roofs. Those who belonged to the

more progressive set, the leaders of advanced thought, and the members of the Browning Club, had iron-frame houses with curved roofs. But all this Paul found out later.

At present he was content to interest himself in the Ontowasco House. He had walked in there with his wife, in time for a late breakfast, and the appearance of two dusty strangers carrying hand-bags had attracted no particular attention; for Greenhill Plains was the terminus not only of two semi-paralyzed railroads, but of three stage-routes so old that they had forgotten how to die, and of one line of horse-cars. Many country people "came up" to Greenhill Plains. They found it more convenient than New York, being much nearer, and in all other respects just as satisfactory.

The Ontowasco House was the regular first-class hotel which you will find in every town like Greenhill Plains. It was a long, three-story brown-stone building, standing on the main street, under a row of great elms. On the first floor were the hotel-office, the barroom, the barber-shop, the drug-store and the sewing-machine agency, which was also a real-estate office. On the broad brick sidewalk in front, the respectable loafers of the town sat all day long, tilted back in Shaker chairs, telling each other who was going to be the next President of the United States. From time to time the barroom sucked them in through its swinging doors, and then ejected them—as you may have seen a jelly-fish

idly winnowing his interior with little gargles of salt water.

Paul went in at the ladies' entrance, and climbed a steep and narrow stair, with slippery brass plates on the steps. From the hall above, he turned into the ladies' parlor, guided by a smell of dried Seneca-grass, horse-hair furniture and American-Brussels carpet. Adèle had agreed to wait for him there because their room was very close and small and stuffy, and looked out only on a court above the hotel kitchen.

"I'm afraid you've had a stupid time waiting, my dear," he said as he entered.

"Why, not in the least, Paul," she replied, cheerfully. "I've had a lovely time! Oh, Paul, do you think we could stay here a few days? I've enjoyed myself so much watching the people, that I want to know what it feels like to live here a little while. Have you ever been in a place like this before, Paul?"

No, Paul had not. Neither of them had ever known the deeply human joy of putting up at a second or third class hotel and getting some life for your money. On their wedding-trip they had gone to the best hotels, and had been properly bored.

"You don't know how much I know already, Paul, from just sitting here in this corner by the window. There! do you see that old gentleman down there with his chair tilted back against the barber-shop sign? I mean the one with a bald head and the red handkerchief and the funny

little whiskers under his chin. Paul, that man has had *seven drinks* since you have been away! And do you see the little thin old man in the long coat? Well, he says that some railroad, the something Pacific railroad, is going to run a branch to Greenhill Plains; and then it's going to be the greatest distributing center of the state; and that Syracuse and those places won't be *anything* in comparison. He says if he had a hundred thousand dollars he'd invest it all in real estate here, this minute. But I should think if a man like that had a hundred thousand dollars, it ought to satisfy him, shouldn't you, Paul?"

"Why, yes," said Paul, looking down at the group on the sidewalk. "That and a new neck-tie. A clean collar wouldn't hurt him much, either."

"And then, Paul," went on Adèle, "I saw a hotel-call, and it was very interesting. A lady came in and sent up her card to another lady who stayed in the hotel, and pretty soon the other lady came down. They were *such* queer people, Paul. They weren't old and they weren't young, and they wore their hair in the funniest little spit-curls you ever saw, and their clothes were so queer. They were expensive, you know, and I don't mean to say that they were loud or vulgar; but they had a sort of upholstery look about them."

"I know," said Paul. "'This elegant parlor suit, \$19.49.'"

"That's just it," said Adèle. "And the ladies

sat there, talking so that I couldn't help hearing every word they said. It was just like rehearsing a play or something. And I found out that they both lived together in some place that they both thought a great deal of, and one of them had married a Greenhill Plains man and had come on here to live; and, as he traveled a great deal, they didn't think it worth while to keep house and so they had come to the hotel to live. And the other lady was visiting somewhere near here, I couldn't make out where, but she still lived at this place they were so fond of, and they kept talking about how the first one must miss this place she used to live in, and how delightful the society was there, and how it kept up just as it used to, and how they'd had a perfectly lovely time last Winter, only that, of course, it was getting a little more exclusive every year. And after a while I found out what the place was—and Paul, it was Sheboygan—in Wisconsin. I didn't know that there was a real Sheboygan, did you? I thought it was only a name that the funny papers had made up."

"Well," said Paul, "do you want to stay here and make the acquaintance of Mrs. Sheboygan?"

"Not exactly that," said Adèle; "but I thought we might stay here a few days just—just to take breath."

Paul thought so, too, if they could secure more comfortable quarters. And he went off to negotiate with the hotel-keeper. The hotel-keeper was rather doubtful as to whether he could find any

better rooms, until Paul, who was learning something every day, asked for a large envelope, sealed up the greater part of his \$250, and ostentatiously deposited it in the hotel-safe.

Five minutes later, Mr. and Mrs. Brown had the bridal apartment, consisting of three front rooms and a bathroom, on the main floor of the hotel.

“And if you *should* want to show samples,” said the hotel-keeper, “we won’t charge you nothing for an elegant room right across the hall, with three of the nicest tables you ever set your eyes on.”

XIX

DINNER was served at one o'clock at the Ontowasco House, and it was just a section of that great dinner which is served at one o'clock on week days, and two on Sundays, in one hundred thousand hotels like the Ontowasco House, from Maine to Mendocino, and from the Mouth of the Mississippi to the Margin of Manitoba.

One day it begins with fish, and the next with soup. The soup is called barley soup or beef soup, according as the barley or beef gets the upper hand. If there are bones in the soup, it is ox-tail soup or chicken soup, according to the headwaiter's diagnosis of the bones.

Then comes roast beef, corned beef or mutton-hash, which is pronounced as if it were spelled "mutnash." Vegetables accompany this course—succotash, mashed potato with turnip, canned corn and canned tomatoes—pale vegetables that died too young, because they took no interest in life; all laid out around each plate in little white china bath-tubs, and all having much the same warm, damp taste.

Then came two kinds of pie or one kind of pudding, and the bill-of-fare said "nuts and raisins." They were there, too, in the tall lattice-

work china dish in the middle of the table, and they had been there ever since last Winter.

Now, perhaps, you are pitying the Runaway Browns for running into such a bill-of-fare as this. If you are, you waste the pity which you probably need for your neighbors. Let me tell you, that with youth and appetite and an earnest desire to have a good time it is possible to eat that dinner, enjoy it, and thrive on it. But, none the less, it is well to be careful about getting bits of tin-can solder between your teeth.

The Browns looked for Mrs. Sheboygan, as they had already named her, at the dinner-table, but she was not there. Except for the people of the hotel and a few hurried drummers, they had the great, low dining-room all to themselves. It was evidently the slack season at the Ontowasco House.

After dinner, Adèle wanted to "go somewhere," and Paul went to inquire of the proprietor where that somewhere might be.

"Well," said the proprietor, musingly, "you've been to Greenhill Park—"

"Why no; I haven't," said Paul.

"Oh," said the proprietor, looking at him as though he had said he had never been to church; "you'd better go."

"And how do I go?" inquired Paul.

"Well," said the proprietor, in an injured tone, "you can walk, I suppose, if you choose, but *most* people take the horse-cars."

The proprietor turned sadly and sternly away,

and Paul went out to search for the horse-cars. He found them, or, rather, it, for he encountered no other horse-car in Greenhill Plains, waiting in the street by the side of the hotel. The driver, an affable, red-faced person, said he would start in five minutes; so Paul hurried up Adèle, and they set off with a deal of jingling, for Greenhill Park. There was no conductor, but the driver very kindly showed them how to put their fare in the box; and after they had gone a few blocks, he courteously invited them to come out and sit with him on the front platform, where he kept two camp-stools for the accommodation of his friends.

As they drove along, he enlightened them as to the personal, social, financial and commercial history and topography of the town of Greenhill Plains.

"The man who owns that house there," he said, "is what I call a gentleman. He keeps his business in Serracuse, and just lives here; and he's worth \$450,000. The man next him is worth half a million; the man next *him* ain't worth more than \$50,000 or \$60,000, but he's a professor and principal of the seminary, and I suppose he's an awful learned man. Don't seem to me, though, that if I had brains like him, I'd waste them on Latin and Greek, and have the only house in the street without a cupalow."

Paul remarked upon the fact that he and his wife were the only passengers.

"Why, yes," said the driver, cheerfully. "I

seen you was strangers in town just as soon as I set eyes on yer. This ain't the time for the real fashionable folks. You won't find nobody at the Park but nurses and children. But you wait an hour, and you'll see more elegant people there than you ever saw in your life before. They come out there and tilt at them rings every afternoon, just like a tournament of ancient times. Oh, it's grand there, along about half-past three or so!"

When they came in sight of Greenhill Park, Adèle gave a little cry, half of delight and half of disappointment. The delight was at Greenhill, and the disappointment was at the Park. The Browns had made their entrance into the town by the way of the valley road from the south, and they had been somewhat puzzled by the name of the place. But now, as they came out from among the trees and houses, going northward, they saw at once the reason of the name.

"You might say the rhyme and the reason, too, Paul, for it is simply *poetical!*"

Right before them stretched out a broad green plain, miles of level pasture land with hardly a tree to break the smooth expanse of green—or, rather, of greens.

"Paul, I never knew how many colors green was until now," said Adèle; "there's almost everything there from blue to yellow."

"Them's the market-gardens," explained the driver.

They didn't pay any attention to him.

That was the Plain. And beyond the Plain was the Green Hill—a beautiful, great, satisfying green hill, such as you rarely see, except on Sunday-school merit-cards; towering up, a sort of big spur from a chain of smaller hills that faded away from it on each side, modestly receding into the background.

It was certainly a delightful view, and it gave some reason for the self-complacency with which Greenhill Plains regarded itself. Not that a provincial town needs any reason for self-complacency; it always has the self-complacency, with or without reason, else it would not be a provincial town. But Greenhill Park was distinctly a disappointment. It was a spacious enclosure within a high board fence, whitewashed, except for a dozen painted panels. On one of these a sign directed the stranger to go to the Greenhill Pants Company for pants. The other eleven panels bore the statement, over a date of the year before last, that applications for space in this valuable advertising privilege should be promptly made to P. W. Skee, Greenhill Park. An arching sign over the entrance of the Park told that Mr. Skee was its proprietor.

“That’s Pete Skee’s house there at the gate,” said the driver; “and that’s Mrs. Skee sitting on the piazza with the other lady. You get your tickets of her.”

When she saw them coming, Mrs. Skee descended from the verandah of her house. Her residence was small but ornate, like a gothic dog-

kennel. Her companion remained seated with her hands in her lap. She wore an expression of not having noticed that the conversation had been interrupted. Mrs. Skee sold them two tickets for fifteen cents each, and the Browns passed in. As they went by the verandah, Paul noticed that Adèle's eyes were earnestly fixed upon Mrs. Skee's friend, who was just remarking to Mrs. Skee in a tone of stately compliment:

"How elegantly you do take to public life, Almeena!"

Adèle touched Paul's arm. "That's her—she, I mean."

"Who?" asked Paul.

"The lady from Sheboygan!"

The Browns found Greenhill Park interesting, not so much for what there was in Greenhill Park, but because they were quite willing to find anything interesting. As the driver had told them, the only visitors besides themselves were, so far, a few nurse-maids and their charges, and nothing was going on, except a large merry-go-round worked by steam, which was slowly revolving, bearing one solitary passenger, a yellow-haired child on a giraffe. From time to time the child wailed dismally, whereupon his nurse broke off her conversation with the other nurses long enough to transfer him to an elephant or a sheep, on the back of which he was trundled around until he wailed again, when he was put back on the giraffe.

The Browns wandered contentedly around and

examined the various attractions of the Park. There were a stand and seats for camp-meetings and political gatherings. There was a sort of race-track. There were stalls to hold cattle at the time of the county fair. There was an exhibition hall which might have held the merry-go-round when it was stored away for the Winter. There was a base-ball ground. There were two wooden swings or scups. Then there were horse-sheds. And everywhere there was whitewash.

By-and-by a young man came in at the gate. He wore very fashionable clothes, including a light overcoat too short for him, a collar too tall for him, a fawn-colored derby hat too small for him, and a pair of yellow "spats" too conspicuous for him or for anything less noticeable than a lighthouse.

"That's one of the aristocrats," said Paul; "it's half-past-three o'clock, and the others will be along soon, I guess. Let's get up here and take in the tournament."

They climbed up on what did duty for a grand stand at the finish of the sort of race-track, and sat down to await the coming of the proud world of Greenhill Plains.

XX

“**T**HEY really are coming, Paul,” said Adèle, her eyes lighting up with a pleased expression.

And they certainly were coming, any number of them. Within fifteen minutes the waste places of Mr. Skee’s park were transformed into veritable garden spots, blooming with the flower of Greenhill Plains society. Some came on foot, but more came in carriages—carriages which were perhaps a little old-fashioned, but stately and respectable—drawn by very good horses—only they were all roadsters; not steppers. From the elevated seats which Paul and Adèle had taken, they could see the long procession strung out upon the straight highway, leading out from the town to the park, and it was a cheerful and engaging sight.

The aristocrats of Greenhill Plains seemed to be a pleasant lot of people, and to know each other very well. The men ran a little too much to spats and elegance, and the ladies all looked as though they took their fashion magazines a trifle too hard. But what do such things matter where everybody is perfectly and entirely satisfied?

Greenhill Plains’s society moved around among itself with an air of considerable distinction.

Nearly every one carried his or her head a little to one side, and smiled with both corners of the mouth down. In a lower plane of usefulness the twinkling of the spats kept up the pleasant impression created by the animated faces and the New York hats.

The Browns noticed with surprise that although a great number of people had already gathered in the Park, they all kept together in that portion of the grounds nearest the gate; and not one of them so much as looked toward the race-track, across whose desolate expanse the two strangers gazed wonderingly at the interesting scene.

"Why do you suppose they don't have the tournament, Paul?" said Adèle. "Do you suppose they don't want to have it before us, and are waiting for us to go away?"

"I should think not, my dear," said Paul. "There goes a gong, now. Perhaps that will start something."

Sure enough, the sudden clang of a gong seemed to send a sharp agitation through the crowd of fashionables. It grew dense for a moment, then it opened out, and finally ten or twelve young men stepped forward into a bare space in front of the merry-go-round, and there removed their covert-coats, which they handed with dignity to other young men who took the coats over their arms and retired respectfully into the throng. Then a man in his shirt sleeves appeared who looked, somehow, as if he must be Mr. Skee, accompanied by a negro bearing an armful of

short wooden spears, each with a gilded point. These spears he distributed among the young men, who then, apparently quite unconscious of the admiring gaze of a hundred bright feminine eyes, advanced proudly upon the merry-go-round.

"Oh, Paul," whispered Adèle, hysterically, quivering from head to foot as she touched his arm, "don't tell me that they're really going to—Oh, Paul, is that the tournament?—It's too absurd! I shall shriek, I know I shall!"

"Sh-h-h-h-h-h!" whispered Paul; "behave yourself."

Each of the young men mounted one of the animals of the merry-go-round; those on the elephant and other dark-colored mounts making a particularly effective display of their spats. The negro connected the steam-engine with a small orchestrion, and the machine started up, this time with an accompaniment of lively music; and, as the riders were whirled around, they endeavored, with varying degrees of skill, to catch upon their spear-points the brass curtain-rings which Mr. Skee, standing upon a three-legged stool, hung upon a lofty peg as often as was necessary.

"I'm betting on the pearl derby, the one on the dromedary," whispered Paul.

But Adèle's eyes were running over with happy tears.

Paul would have lost his bet. The winner of the tournament was a gentleman in a white high hat, who bestrode the moolley cow. He

descended from his charger amid the acclamations of his fellow-contestants and the entire gathering; and a beautiful young lady, with the prettiest possible blush on her cheeks, stepped out from the crowd and fastened a bow of red satin ribbon upon his breast with a gold baby-pin.

"My dear," said Paul, "you do wrong to laugh. This is one way of being happy; and it is far, far better than bull-fighting."

XXI

IT was but a little past four o'clock when Paul and Adèle slipped unnoticed from the scene of merriment in the Park, and found themselves alone with the market-gardens and the green hill. Far down the road Greenhill Plains' one horse-car jingled merrily on its way back to the town, and they saw that they would have to wait at least an hour before it would come back to pick them up. So they decided to stroll on and examine the merit-card eminence at close quarters.

The road took them to the hill as straight as a string, but it was a long walk and a hot one. The market-gardens looked cool in their varying shades of green, but the sun has to be very low indeed, as Paul remarked, before beet-tops and lettuce-heads and tomato-vines cast a grateful shade. When they got to the hill they were quite warm, and so they set out to climb to the top to see if they could catch a breeze there. They found the breeze half-way up, and then, as they gazed down upon the market-gardens on the plain, that variegated expanse looked cool again.

But they knew well that the walk back would not be cool; and, as they reached the summit, the thought of the long, hot high-road far below them made them burst out in the simultaneous expres-

sion of two widely differing but equally natural wishes.

"I wish," cried Adèle, "that we didn't have to go back at all, but could just stay here and live."

"I wish I had a drink," said Paul.

The sound of a human snore fell upon their ears. They looked up and saw that both their wishes might be readily granted, for right in front of them was a large, weather-beaten sign:

GREENHILL SUMMIT HOUSE.

The sign was the largest thing about the house, which was perhaps as small a structure as ever did duty for a hostelry. It looked like a miscalculation for a bird-house—"just as though," Adèle suggested, "some liberal-minded carpenter had been told to build a home for a family of pelicans, and, never having seen a pelican, had misconceived the creature's size, and guessed roughly at something half-way between an eagle and a dodo."

A sound of snoring came from the Summit House, although there seemed to be nobody inside. They looked in through the open door and saw a barroom not much larger than a butler's pantry. Back of this was a still smaller room with a bunk in the wall. The third room of the house was as big as the other two put together, and served as a kitchen and dining-room. All three were empty, and yet the snoring went on, heavy and regular, except when it was broken by an occasional, thick, asthmatic wheeze.

“Hi, there!” shouted Paul; “any one around?” But no answer came to him save the steady snore.

“It’s almost uncanny,” said his wife. “It’s as though some one had left the ghost of a snore here.”

“That’s no ghost of a snore,” said Paul; “that snore’s alive, and I’ll bet you a dollar it weighs two hundred pounds at the least. What’s more, I’m going to find it.”

He entered the house and carefully examined every room. Then he went around the house; and presently he called to Adèle from behind the kitchen chimney. Adèle hastened around and found him gazing at a very fat man with enormous clean-shaven dewlaps hanging down like wattles from the gloomiest face that ever was put on a fat man. He was fast asleep, in his shirt sleeves, his wooden chair tilted back in the angle of the projecting chimney. In front of him was an untidy ash-heap picked out with tin cans and broken crockery. Beyond this were the tangled, scrubby woods of the hilltop. His back was against the house, and the house stood between him and the broad prospect of Greenhill’s checkered plain, and the pretty town nestling in its far-off woods. It was a strange place to choose for a nap, the more so that the evening sun shone right in the fat man’s face and brought the perspiration out in a sort of shining veil, all over his huge features.

“Wake up!” Paul called; but he might as well

have called out to the chimney or the house. He had to shake the fat man violently before he could even get him to open his eyes, and then he only stared sleepily at his visitors, and said:

"What do you want?"

"We want something to drink," said Paul.

"Water, I suppose," said the fat man, in a dismal, despairing sort of way.

"No," said Paul; "lemonade, beer, ginger-ale, anything."

"Only two of you?" said the fat man.

"Only two."

"What's two drinks?" the fat man demanded, as though he were deeply impressed with the hollowness of life.

"Two drinks," Paul replied with decision, "is two drinks."

"That's so," assented the fat man, more cheerily, as he left his seat; "you ain't nobody's fool, be ye?"

He mopped his face with his shirt sleeve, and led the way around the house.

"Do you generally select that spot to take your afternoon nap?" Paul politely inquired.

The fat man said "Yes."

"I shouldn't think it was a very good place for custom," suggested Paul.

"'Tain't," said the fat man; "ain't no custom."

"And then," remarked Adèle, dreamily, "you don't get the view; but I don't suppose you want the view when you're asleep?"

They were just coming around the corner of the house. The fat man stopped short, and shook his fat fist at the entire landscape spread out before him.

"I don't want that view," he cried savagely, "when I'm asleep nor when I'm awake; when I'm drunk, nor when I'm sober; nor no other time. Nor you wouldn't," he added, impressively, "if you was in my place."

"Why, what's the matter with it?" asked Paul.

"Matter!" said the fat man, with great solemnity. "Why, look there!"

He pointed with a gesture of tragic dignity to Mr. Skee's far distant Park, from which the tide of fashion was just beginning to set back toward the town. Between one and two hundred of Greenhill's fairest and bravest were stirring up a cloud of dust that shone like gold in the late sunlight.

"There!" said the fat man; "how would you like to set here day after day and watch that, and not have one of them monkeys ever set his foot on this here hill? No, nor nobody else," he continued bitterly; "exceptin' you two, and you don't look like real drinkin' folks. I ain't had a customer this week; and last week I didn't have nobody, only a total abstinence sewing-machine agent, who came here, by thunder, and give me a track headed 'Why Spoil Good Water?' Darned if he wer'n't crusadin' against root beer!"

The fat man brought his one table and his two chairs out from the kitchen, and his guests

sat down by the front door and ordered lemonade and lager beer. It was evident that the resources of the house were not calculated to meet any great rush of custom. It took the fat man ten minutes of arduous search to find three shriveled and fly-specked lemons, which he assassinated with a clasp-knife for Adèle's lemonade; then he took his spade and began to dig in the earth in front of the house.

"Can't I have any beer?" asked Paul.

"You can," said the fat man, reassuringly, "just as soon as I dig it up. I can't afford to have no ice up here this weather, and I have to keep my beer cool the best way I can."

And after a few minutes of industrious digging, he disinterred a bottle of lager and gave it to Paul.

The fat man brightened up and became quite cheerful as he saw his guests enjoying their beverages, and when Paul purchased two very dry cigars from him, and presented him with one, he came to the conclusion that life was worth living, after all, and turned suddenly talkative.

He told them all about himself and his affairs; and it seemed to afford him so much pleasure to do so that they had not the heart to stop him. His position was a peculiar one. The hill and the hotel belonged to a stock-company that was some day going to erect a great hotel on the hilltop, and run a switchback railroad to the summit. As yet, however, they had got no further than to procure several valuable franchises,

and it was to keep these alive that they had engaged the fat man to conduct the Summit House, paying him both salary and commission, so that he could neither evade the responsibility nor yet be his own master.

"If I hang on and they hang on," said the fat man, grimly, "we're both of us winners some day, sure; but whether we can hang on or not depends on how long we can buck against that place of Skee's down there. The company, they say it's pretty hard work paying my salary under these circumstances, but I tell 'em that payin' my salary ain't nothin' to the moral strain of settin' here day after day and seein' that man Skee gatherin' in his ill-gotten wealth while I'm wearin' my shirt-sleeves to save my coat."

They agreed with the fat man, whose name was Jepp, that his lot was certainly a hard one, and their assurances seemed to comfort him greatly.

"You're right," he said; "I knowed you'd say so. I seen discrimination in your face the minit I set eyes on you. Where might you be from, now?"

And to their surprise they found that Mr. Jepp seemed to take quite as much interest in them as he did in himself. He was not unduly inquisitive. He seemed to care more for their opinions, tastes and views in general; as though he were grateful for a treat in the way of intellectual companionship. They both found his conversation so soothing and agreeable that they hardly noticed how late it was getting, until the factory-whistles be-

gan to blow in Greenhill Plains. Then Paul said he was afraid they must start, or they would be late for supper at the Ontowasco House.

"Supper!" said the fat man, in astonishment. "My! you ain't figgerin' to get back to the Ontowasco House in time for supper, are you? How'll you do that?"

"Why," said Paul, "we thought we'd walk down and get the horse-car."

"The horse-car don't run no more after Mr. Skee's Park closes. Ain't been runnin' this hour."

"Dear me!" cried Adèle. "Oh, Paul, I *can't* walk all that way!"

"No, surely you can't," assented the man. "It's better than three miles from the foot of the hill."

"Can't we get a carriage?" inquired Paul.

"Carriage?" repeated the fat man, scornfully. "Why, my dear man alive, there ain't no carriage this side of Greenhill Plains! I'll tell you what, though—"

But he did not tell them what. He fell into a profound meditation, with his chin on his hand, raising his eyes occasionally to look from Paul to Adèle. Adèle had done her best to be a brave little girl so far; but sometimes small things are trying out of all proportion to their size, and the little woman who had uncomplainingly borne a night in a river flood felt her lip beginning to quiver as she thought of the long walk over that dusty road, in the silent, lonesome, yearning,

hungry twilight. Her eyes also began to get big, and to wink a little, but all she said as she stood and waited was:

“Oh, Paul!”

Paul hastened the current of Mr. Jepp’s reflections.

“Look here,” he said; “I have *got* to have a carriage or some sort of vehicle. You fix it for me, and I’ll make it all right with you.”

This is the American’s password, his magic formula, in which he puts his whole faith and trust. There are hundreds of thousands of Americans at this very moment who are laying out to get into Paradise on that phrase.

Its effect upon St. Peter remains to be seen, but it was amply sufficient for Mr. Jepp. He pointed out that by the terms of his contract, and the franchises owned by the company, he was legally bound to keep the Summit House open every minute of the twenty-four hours; and that in consenting to go where his partners might see him, even though he left a substitute in his place, he incurred a risk of serious monetary loss. But when Paul showed a willingness to meet this danger half-way, Mr. Jepp said frankly that he could not forbear to act as one gentleman should to another, and he would walk to Greenhill Plains himself, and send a carriage out within an hour and a half—the Browns agreeing to keep the Summit House technically in full swing during his absence.

This cost Paul very nearly all the money that

he had in his pocket, for the most of his two hundred and fifty dollars was in the hotel safe. But then it would have been simply absurd to put a money value on the look which came into Adèle's face when she found that she did not have to walk back.

Mr. Jepp got into his coat, which was hanging in his bedroom, with remarkable agility for one so stout, and hastily gave Paul directions for the conduct of the establishment during his absence.

"There won't nobody come," he said, "except the boy with the milk; but in case anybody should, I might as well show you through the cemetery."

"The cemetery?" repeated Paul.

"Why, yes," said Mr. Jepp: "where the stuff's buried. See? Ginger ale," he continued, pointing to the ground with his foot, "lager, sass-preller, lemon sody, root-beer; but there ain't no use diggin' for the root-beer, 'cause we're out of it."

Here Mr. Jepp paused and looked doubtfully at Paul. "And if you, personally," he said; "I ain't speaking for the general public, should want a little drop of anything more reachin' than slops, why I'll show you where to get it." And, leading Paul behind the bar, he discovered to him a small cupboard in whose depths lurked several uninviting bottles, each of which contained what might be called sample dregs of ardent spirits.

"There!" said Mr. Jepp, with so much pride that Paul could only thank and pity him.

"Make yourself free of everything," was Mr.

Jepp's parting injunction; "the house is yours, and if your lady wants to lay down on my bed she'll find it clean and comfortable. If there's anything in the house you want to eat, why, it's yours. Make yourself right to home. But I'll be back inside of one hour and a half. Call it," he concluded, with an air of cautious speculation, "one hour and twenty minutes—me and the carriage."

He started down his winding way, and once more the Browns were left alone; and the cool shades of the evening began to settle down upon the sylvan gloom around them.

Adèle slipped her hand into Paul's. From far below them Mr. Jepp's voice rose with a cheerful ring.

"One hour," it said, "*and* twenty minutes."

XXII

FOR a while it was pleasant sitting up there with all the world at their feet. There is always something agreeable about being on a mountain-top and feeling exalted above the rest of humanity. That is why we figure heaven as a place high up in the air, and why Bostonians live on Beacon Hill. Broken murmurs of the busy life below them came up, as they lay on the short, wiry grass under the gnarled trees, and watched the setting sun. Cows mooed afar off, and their bells tinkled faintly. The thrushes were singing their evening song, which, with some thrushes at least, is quite different from their *matinée* performance, and particularly appropriate to the season; which has led me to believe that the thrush is rather a superior bird in his way.

But after a while it grew monotonous, and they began to speculate as to when the boy would arrive with the milk. They had watched Mr. Jepp out of sight. They had explored every nook and corner of the Summit House, and now there was nothing between them and utter mental stagnation but the coming of the boy with that milk. It was a quarter of eight, and Mr. Jepp had been gone an hour and forty-five minutes when the boy appeared. He was a common-place boy with a freckled face, who did not look as sur-

prised at seeing them as they somehow thought he ought to look.

"Where's *he*?" the boy inquired carelessly.

"Do you mean Mr. Jepp?" asked Paul.

"Yep," said the boy.

"Mr. Jepp," said Paul, "has gone to Greenhill Plains; he will be back shortly."

"No he won't," said the boy.

"What do you mean?" demanded Paul.

"Did he leave you here to take care of things till he came back?" the boy asked, in a decisive tone.

"Yes," replied Paul, rather faintly.

"Then he won't come back till he's had his drunk out," said the boy. "He never does when he can get 'em to stay. Did he get any money out of you?"

"Some—" stammered Paul; "that is—well—four dollars—"

The boy whistled.

"That will keep him goin' most a week," he said, as he slung his empty milk-pail over his arm.

"But here, hold on!" cried Paul, for the boy was already starting off, "there must be some mistake about this. Are you sure? How do you know?"

"He's my dad," said the boy, as he moved out into the tangled hollow of the wood.

Paul was almost afraid to face Adèle with this piece of news; but she took it much more philo-

sophically than he had any reason to expect she would.

"I'm sure it might be a great deal worse, Paul," she said. "The bed-room is perfectly nice and clean, for I've looked to see, and if we could find something for supper we should do very well. If I could get something to eat I think I could stand anything; and really, do you know, Paul, I was getting very tired of the Ontowasco House. I was just thinking about it when you were talking to the boy."

"Adèle, you are an angel," said Paul.

"Nonsense!" said Adèle, "though of course I am glad, dear, if you think so."

They investigated the larder of the Summit House with better results than they had dared to hope for, although these results were no more than ham and potatoes, and something that had aspirations in the way of being coffee. The sight of a couple of lonely, gawky hens, that looked as if they were trying to make up their minds to give over domesticated life altogether and adopt the profession of wild-fowl, suggested the possibility of eggs; and search under the bushes behind the house was rewarded with a couple in delightfully fresh condition. And as folks who have a ham-and-egg appetite and the ham-and-eggs to go with it are not in the least to be pitied, it was naturally enough two contented and happy Browns who stretched themselves out an hour or so later to watch the Summer moon climbing up the sky.

When a young couple can only look back on a courtship conducted in a Philadelphia seminary for young ladies, under what may be called circumstances of aggravated bread-and-butter and slate-pencil, mountain-tops and Midsummer moonlight nights come in uncommonly handy, even if they are a little late. Paul lit his pipe, and they lay out in the white glare and looked up at the stars.

"They were very good, Paul," said Adèle, "and I am glad you liked them; but where was it that we had such delicious ones on our wedding trip?"

"At Saratoga, dear. Don't you remember? they were Saratoga chips."

"Oh, yes!" said Adèle; "how stupid of me to forget it! I must learn to make those. Do you think I could?"

"Oh, you could learn to make anything!" said Paul, with perfect confidence.

May be you don't think that was romance. Well, you don't know; you simply don't know.

It was so much romance that they both started up almost guiltily, as a strange sound suddenly reached them from far down the mountain-side.

"Why, Paul!" cried Adèle; "it must be Mr. Jepp with the carriage. What shall we do? I don't want to go back to the Ontowasco House after making up that lovely bunk."

"Well, we'll tell *him* to go back," said Paul. "He can have our room at the Ontowasco House, and we'll swop with him. Perfectly simple."

The sound of wheels slowly drew nearer as the vehicle crawled up the mountain-side. At last it came to a place where the twisting and doubling road ran through a cleared spot, and here the Browns, looking down, saw that it was not a carriage nor yet Mr. Jepp, but a ramshackle farm-wagon driven by a singularly lean man, with a weedy, long, goat-like beard. Adèle looked a little frightened.

"Who can it be, Paul?" she whispered.

"I don't know," replied Paul. "Some farmer going home, I suppose. I only hope he doesn't want to stay here to-night, because—"

"Because what?" asked Adèle.

"Because he shan't."

But it looked as though their hospitality was to be put to the test, for when the stranger reached the summit of the hill, he hitched his horse, which was as ramshackle as the wagon, to a convenient tree, and slowly advanced toward them.

"Evenin'," said he.

"Good evening," said Paul.

"Seasonable night," said the stranger. "Jepp around?"

"Mr. Jepp," said Paul, "is in Greenhill Plains."

"Yes," said the stranger, reflectively; "yes, I seen him there. Fuller'n a tick."

"May I ask," inquired Paul, "if it is customary for Mr. Jepp to get intoxicated?"

"Oh, yes!" said the stranger; "quite so."

He still stroked his beard, while his eyes wandered vacantly around.

"Quite so," he repeated reflectively; "quite so."

Paul grew impatient.

"Can I do anything for you?" he said at last. "I am in charge here during Mr. Jepp's absence. I am sorry I can't put you up, as the accommodations of the establishment are rather limited; and I can't give you any supper, for my wife and I have eaten all there was; but anything else that I can do for you—"

"I'm going home," said the man with the beard, "and I don't want no supper." Still he stood in a doubtful, uneasy sort of way, as though he wanted something and didn't care to mention it.

"Is there anything you'd like to drink?" inquired Paul. "There is some nice, cool gingerale."

The strange man pulled at his beard in an agony of indecision. At last he spoke.

"I'll take a cocktail," he said.

"I am afraid," began Paul—but the stranger raised a pair of mournful eyes toward heaven.

"I couldn't take nothing only a cocktail," he said. "I feel a kind of goneness here." He laid his hand upon his stomach, and Paul perceived that he did, indeed, look faint and pale, and appeared to be suffering.

"I hate to do it," he said sadly, as though he were speaking to himself.

Paul felt his sympathies aroused. "I'll do what I can, sir," he said; "but I'm afraid this is not the place to come to for a good cocktail. However, if you feel faint, I suppose the liquor will do you good, any way."

He started for the bar, but the man held out a hand as if to detain him.

"No; don't," he said; and then he checked himself as suddenly.

"Yes," he said; "go ahead, I'll take it."

Paul went behind the bar and lit the kerosene lamp. There he was joined by Adèle.

"Paul," said she, "that man is deceiving you. I know it."

"How do you know?" asked Paul.

"Because I saw his expression as soon as he saw you go in here. Paul, I don't believe he's got any more stomach-ache than you or I have."

"Hush, my dear," said Paul, for the man had already followed them in, and was standing by the doorway.

"I don't care, dear," said his wife; "I'm right; you'll see if I'm not. That man's a humbug and a hypocrite. You may trust a woman's instinct. I am perfectly certain of it."

Now, there are few harder moments in a man's life than the moment when his wife tells him that another man in whom he has trusted is abusing his confidence. It is a moment that has been too much for the good sense and discretion of experienced and middle-aged men, long past hugging the delusions of their youth; and that

it should move a comparatively green youngster to indiscretion is not to be wondered at. Paul looked in angry doubt at the dark figure by the door, and thought he could detect something deceitful and dishonest in the very turn of the stranger's head. He felt all the irritation of the honest man, who takes his drink and sees no harm in it, for the man who takes it in violation of his own principles. And, just as a sense of this feeling came over him, temptation in its most trying form put itself in his way. For I take it that no American is more keenly tempted than when the spirit of revenge and his sense of humor work together. Paul's eye had fallen upon a bottle labeled "benzine."

"By thunder!" he said to himself; "that fellow shall have a cocktail, and he shall not forget it in a hurry, either."

"There!" he said, pushing across the counter the drink he had mixed, and his gorge rose as he saw the stranger come forward and continue his curious pantomime of hesitancy.

"What a humbug!" thought Paul; "and all that nonsense for the benefit of two people who don't care a stiver what he drinks, or how he drinks it."

The stranger came up to the bar in a doubtful, nervous way, as though even yet he had not made up his mind, and Paul gave the drink a final, disgusted shove. This seemed to decide him. He pushed back a coin to Paul, and Paul slung it contemptuously into the till. The man grasped

his glass and drained it at one draught. Then an expression of horror came over his face—an expression of horror which Paul never forgot to his dying day. The expression of horror was succeeded by one of profound doubt and wonderment. Then the man smelled of his glass, then he lifted the flap of his old-fashioned frock coat and smelled of that; and Paul knew that his sin had found him out; and that whatever that man knew about cocktails, he knew benzine when he smelled it. He stood almost paralyzed while the stranger walked solemnly around the bar, peered into the little cupboard, found the benzine bottle, examined the label, and then straightened himself up with a sigh of satisfaction. All trace of hesitancy had disappeared from the countenance of the man with the goat-like beard. He looked at Paul for one moment with an expression of withering calm.

“I didn’t mean to,” he said, “but I don’t mind doing it now. Young man, I’m the Sheriff of North Greenhill County, and I arrest you for selling liquor without a license.”

XXIII

THE moonlight shone brightly down upon the upper end of North Greenhill County—not the upper end of Greenhill County, which is a pleasant and civilized lowland, but of North Greenhill County, which is a lonely northward upland, spotted with abandoned farms.

With its last rays that night it looked down upon one of the most desolate of all these neglected ghosts of homesteads. It may have been a large farm at one time, but it had evidently been so many kind of farms in the course of its struggle for existence, that its unlucky acres had long ceased to give the faintest suggestion of pride or promise, or even of plain, ordinary self-respect. There were wrecks of stock-barns and stables; there were stubble-fields where corn and rye had grown; there were broad patches where stray pumpkins and lonely watermelons were all that was left to tell of some forgotten period of cultivation; there were pear and apple orchards gone to wrack and ruin. And apparently one of the latest phases of the farm's struggle for existence had been a desperate attempt at poultry-raising, for two or three home-made brooder-houses and chicken-runs stood in the back yard of the old frame farm-house, and showed fewer

signs of decay than the dismal homestead itself.

At the end door of the newest of these structures—a low building with a narrow-paned skylight in its sloping roof—stood three figures: a good-looking young man and a good-looking young woman, both quite pale in the flooding moonlight, and a lean, long man with a goat-like beard. This latter was speaking in a tone between dubiousness and determination.

“It may be an outrage,” he said, “but it’s all the place I’ve got to put you, and it’s all the lock-up the town’s had in three years. If your lady don’t like it, she can sit outside; she ain’t under no arrest.”

“Oh, no, Paul!” cried Adèle; “I’ll go in there with you.”

“Very well, Marm,” said the Sheriff; “the last man in there was a nigger, and he was perfectly satisfied.”

A minute later he had locked the door upon his two captives. He took a step toward the house, then he stopped and seemed to hesitate. But, after a moment, as though to give himself courage, he lifted the skirt of his coat to his nose; and, as he smelled of it, a look of stern resolution came into his face, and he proceeded with a firm step toward the house.

Paul Brown gazed after him through the narrow parallel bars of the skylight-frame, in which a few panes of glass were still to be seen. He clenched his hands, and his chest heaved. When he saw the farm-house door close behind the

Sheriff, he slowly took off his coat, folded it, laid it upon an inverted water-pail in the corner, and with a courtly gesture invited his wife to take the seat thus prepared. Then, without saying a word, he proceeded to try the roof and the sides of the house with his shoulder.

The gentlemen who can put their shoulders through inch plank and two-by-three joist may be seen almost any evening at any well-regulated Bowery theater, escaping from loathsome dungeons and burning garrets, generally with a lovely heroine thrown over the shoulder that is not doing the bucking. But then they have six nights practice a week, to say nothing of matinées; and as this was the first time that Paul Brown had tried it, it was no wonder that he failed. When he found that he could not break out, he sat down on a box by the side of his wife and hid his face in his hands. Something shook his shoulders. They were only flesh and blood, after all. When his wife saw his shoulders shake, she put both her arms around his head and said:

“I don’t mind, dear.”

But Paul minded, and he knew in his inmost soul that he had good reason to mind. So far, in their little journey into the world, they had met with ill-luck, discomfort, privation, and even with physical danger. They had encountered suspicion and rude treatment; they had been cheated and imposed upon. And they had taken all that had come with light and contented hearts, as their share of the bad chances in the game of life.

But now they stood face to face with the bitter opposition of personal malignity, and Paul knew that all the pleasant and joyous spirit had gone out of their wayfaring, even if he were able to save this brave little wife from cruel annoyance and humiliation, such as a mean and narrow-minded yokel might delight to inflict, in the gratification of a petty spite.

And, no matter how long out of service it may be, a chicken-house never entirely recovers from the smell.

Suddenly Paul felt his wife's encircling arms twitch violently.

"Paul," she whispered, releasing him, "look there!"

As Paul looked up, he could not check a quick, cold chill about the roots of his hair. Straight in front of him, clearly visible through the skylight, stood a gigantic coal-black negro, stock-still in the moonlight, like some uncanny monster out of the Arabian Nights. There was something frightful about the huge creature as he stood there, silent and motionless, staring at them with his broad, brute-like face. It was not until Paul observed a slight but regular lateral movement of the lower jaw, that he recognized the fact that a tie of common humanity bound him to the strange apparition. Paul smoked and the negro chewed, but tobacco belongs to the world of men and not to the world of spirits.

A gleam of hope sprang up before the prisoners, as the negro, with a sudden, cat-like move-

ment, advanced toward them, and grinned at them through a broken pane. It was a friendly grin; a kindly grin; a broad grin, perhaps; but it seemed to them a very beautiful grin.

"D'ye want to get out, boss?" he whispered. And the first twang of angel harps could not have sounded more sweet.

"I DO!" said Paul, with a vehemence and emphasis which he had been saving up for some time.

"What's it wuth?" asked the negro, flashing his white teeth in the moonlight.

"Anything!" said Paul, who felt for the moment that if that negro wanted the Congo River he ought to have it.

"Anything ain't nothing, once you get out," said the negro with a cheerful laugh.

Paul saw that he had to deal with a man of the world, and went down into his pocket for his last handful of change.

He held it to the light in the hollow of his palm. The negro's face lit up with the illumination of avarice.

"Hand it out here, boss," he said.

"Hand *us* out," Paul said briefly and decisively.

Caucasian and Ethiopian gazed into each other's eyes. It was a struggle of will; and the Caucasian triumphed. The Ethiopian's eyes fell.

"I've got to trust to your honor as a gentleman, boss," he said. "What are you in for? Horses?"

"Confound your black impudence!" began Paul; and instantly a smile of happy confidence irradiated the hitherto doubtful face of the colored stranger.

"*Knowed* you was a gentleman, boss," he said, promptly. "Now, just step to that eend over there and put yo' hand up to the roof. Feel a hook and staple thah, sah? Yas? Well, jest onhitch that hook. Now push the skylight up. Dere you are, sir. Lemme hold it open till your lady gets out."

In a dazed sort of way, Paul stepped out and helped Adèle after him, while the negro stood by, amiably grinning and holding the ventilating skylight open. In a dazed sort of way Paul paid over the remaining change in his pocket, to the last cent. In a dazed sort of way he inquired in what direction the railroad lay; and in a dazed sort of way the two Browns went toward the station.

When the midnight train roared on its southward way, after a brief stop at a little branch station just above the border-line of New York and New Jersey, it left behind it a station-agent and a flagman, who gazed speculatively, by the light of a couple of lanterns, at a curious little heap of personal belongings on the shelf in front of the ticket-seller's window.

"Mighty fishy security for two tickets to the Junction, Jim," said the station-agent, reflect-

ively; "but I done it on *her* face, and I'll bet I don't get left, neither."

He turned over the articles in the heap before him. They were as follows:

One nickel-plated Waterbury watch,
One lady's pencil case,
One gentleman's silk pocket-handkerchief,
One penknife with a corkscrew in it,
One small onyx scarf-pin,
One silver match-safe,
One very dry cigar,
One visiting card:

Mr. Paul Brown

XXIV

IT was just six o'clock of a Summer's morning. The sun was lifting a soft opal mist from off a little Jersey town which peeped out of a nest of young green trees. A couple of young people, who looked somewhat the worse for wear, turned into a broad, cheerful street with taller trees along the edge of the roadway, and with a row of low, spreading-roofed cottages on each side. Every house stood in a large generous patch of lawn or garden. At the further end of the street stood an old white church with a great pillared portico in front.

The young people turned into the gateway of one of the prettiest houses on the street. The roses were blooming in the front yard. The gravel walks were as neat as a new pin. Ampelopsis climbed over half the house; and there were scarlet runners on the sunny side.

One of the couple was a young man. The other was a young woman. When they got inside the gate they looked at each other, and the young woman said to the young man:

“Paul, do you know where we are?”

The young man looked with inquiring interest at the ampelopsis and the scarlet-runners.

“Paul,” said the young woman, “we are At Home.”

Paul felt that some religious ceremony was needed, so he took off his hat. Then they went into the house. The bright morning light filtered through the closed blinds into a pretty little parlor. The two young people, who seemed very disheveled, indeed, once they were inside the house, stood in the middle of the room and looked about them.

“It needs pictures,” said Adèle, “and flowers and books and nonsense things. And, Paul, it’s going to have them!”

But Paul was not thinking about the future adornment of the room. He was a man, and he hated to be laughed at. His eyes sought his open desk. He walked straight across the room, picked up a large unopened envelope that was lying upon it, and with a look of rapture he held it up for his wife to see.

“Yes, sir; I took the liberty of not delivering it, sir,” said a familiar voice.

They turned, and saw Mrs. Wimple standing in the doorway.

“Lord bless your dear souls!” said Mrs. Wimple. “I knew you wouldn’t be no year away.” She took off Adèle’s hat and gave her a motherly kiss. “Now you go right upstairs, and get yourselves ready, and I’ll have breakfast on the table in no time. You look like you’ve been traveling all night. I kinder s’picioned you’d be home to-day, and so I raised some of them biscuit over

night, that you say you like so dreffle much. And there's five cucumbers on the vine in the back yard."

And she sailed off, leaving a stream of talk behind her, and went into the kitchen, where she talked right on, to the cat, in the gladness of her heart.

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Brown went upstairs, where they had an orgy with cold water, clean soap, and soft towels. Then they came downstairs, and Adèle led the way out-doors, and they walked down the neat paths among the flowers. Paul thought she was going to pluck a nosegay for the breakfast table, but she was not. She only moved among the flowers, caressing them with the tips of her fingers, patting their heads, and touching their cool cheeks as though they had been so many children. A great fat sleepy stock shook down a dash of water, and wet her hand, as she chucked him under his white double chin; but she only laughed.

"Paul," she said, "do you know how long our year has been?"

"What year?" asked Paul.

He was doing so much thinking that he was stupid for the moment.

"The year that we ran away for," said Adèle. "It began last Monday, and it ends to-day; and to-day's Saturday."

"I knew it wasn't a year" said Paul; "but there was a good deal of it while it lasted."

“Yes,” assented Adèle; “and do you know what *we*’ve been?”

“A pair of fools,” answered Paul, promptly.

“Yes, dear,” said his wife, taking his face between the tips of her dewy fingers and pulling it down, so that she could look into his eyes; “but *nice* fools, don’t you think?”

“Breakfast is ready,” said Mrs. Wimple.

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